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LITERATURE-BASED LANGUAGE ARTS: PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE OF ONE GRADE SIX TEACHER

by

BRENDA K. BELL

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled LITERATURE-BASED LANGUAGE ARTS: PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE OF ONE GRADE SIX TEACHER submitted by BRENDA K. BELL in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to illuminate one teacher's professional philosophy and beliefs underlying a literature-based language arts program. The study focused on that teacher's articulation of the philosophy and beliefs that manifested themselves in the classroom language arts practices.

One Grade Six teacher was chosen for observation in the classroom and for interviewing. The classroom was upper elementary and the language arts program was based on trade literature rather than a published textbook series. The teacher was willing and able to spend the time and energy needed for the purpose of data collection for this study.

Data collected included a total of thirteen audio-taped interviews with the key informant which were later transcribed by the researcher. Unstructured interviews were also conducted with two parents and two administrators. In the role of passive participant observer, the researcher recorded classroom observations of the language arts program in the form of fieldnotes. A number of teacher-student conferences were observed and audio-taped. Documents pertaining to the teacher's planning, evaluating, and reporting procedures were collected as data.

Analysis took the form of perusing interview transcripts, documents, and fieldnotes until themes emerged. Six major themes were identified and described in the study: 1) teaching as a philosophy, 2) a student-centered approach, 3) students as natural learners, 4) the

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Chapter One

Introduction to the Study

In my teaching experiences with young children I was fascinated by a "special" quality in the combination of children and literature. I sensed that, in the interaction between child and story, there was something very special which was of great potential as a learning medium. However, it was more than the magic of sharing stories and poems with children that compelled me to begin to develop a language arts program based on the interaction of children with literature. Literature was fulfilling a function over and above the commonly accepted ones that dealt with enjoyment, motivation, reward, or skill and content learning. I began to understand that the role of literature in the reading curriculum was more complex, and that the literary experience held more potential as a learning medium, than that which was initially obvious.

As I was interested in the role of literature in the language arts curriculum, I began to look around me in an effort to gain insight. I saw more and more teachers incorporating literature into their language arts programs. Educational publishing companies were developing new reading series made up of anthologies of children's literature. A great number of conference and in-service sessions dealt with teaching the language arts through and with literature. I came to realize that

I was not alone in sensing the "specialness" of the encounter between children and literature. Nor was I alone in sensing the educational potential of that encounter.

My own language arts program was based on children's literature rather than a reading series with texts and activity books. My approach was considered as somewhat non-traditional and therefore attracted attention and prompted questions from colleagues and parents. Although the most obvious difference was in the type of reading material utilized, it soon became apparent to me that there were other differences as well. I wondered if these less visible differences had to do with my underlying philosophy and beliefs about children and literature, literacy learning, and about teaching the language arts. As other teachers asked me about my program and children's literature in the language arts, the difficulty I had in responding with something less than a philosophical lecture also indicated to me that there was more to a literature-based language arts program than the mere presence of literature as reading material.

I wanted to know what a teacher's beliefs and understandings about the combination of literature and children in the language arts might be and how they might impact a language arts program. I began to read. I read first about literary response, then about the role of children's literature in literacy learning, and also about factors of curriculum development. In the process I uncovered language arts curricula based on literature and centered on the student's aesthetic response to that

literature. It seemed to me that this literature-based approach to teaching the language arts was a direct consequence of particular beliefs and understandings about the language-learner and the role of literature. I was interested in discovering what the philosophy and beliefs might be for a teacher who chose to develop a literature-based approach to teaching the language arts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to illuminate one teacher's professional philosophy and beliefs that impacted a literature-based language arts program. The study focused on that teacher's articulation of the philosophy and beliefs that manifested themselves in the classroom language arts program. In the process, the researcher investigated how that teacher diagnosed needs, planned for learning, assessed student progress, and reported to parents and administrators.

Research Questions

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. What does this language arts program entail?

2. What philosophy and beliefs underlie this teacher's language arts program?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were utilized for the purposes of this study:

Language arts. The Alberta Curriculum Guide for the Language Arts

(1978, Revised 1982) identifies five strands of the language arts--reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing.

Literature. Huck (1976) defines literature as "the imaginative shaping of life and thought into the forms and structures of language" (p. 4). Literature is seen as a work of art that exists, and is valid, for its intrinsic, aesthetic value.

Literature-based. A language arts program that is literature-based relies on trade literature as its curricular material rather than a published series of texts that are usually accompanied by a teacher's manual and student activity books.

Response. Rosenblatt (1976) identifies two types of literary response that may occur when the reader transacts with text: 1) "efferent" or information seeking and 2) "aesthetic" or personal, emotive processing. Rosenblatt suggests that, contrary to popular belief, the aesthetic response precedes the efferent.

Response-centered. Purves and Monson (1984) propose the implementation of a language arts curriculum centered on the student's individual and personal responses to literature.

Design of the Study

This study sought to identify the philosophy and beliefs impacting the language arts program of one Grade six teacher. The classroom was particular in that it was upper elementary and the language arts program was literature-based. The teacher was distinctive in that he was able and willing to commit his time and energy into articulating

his philosophy and beliefs for the benefit of this research.

As the researcher, I conducted unstructured interviews with the teacher and observed in the language arts classroom. Data collection took place over a period of three months and included 13 unstructured interviews, 22 observation sessions, and 20 documents pertaining to the language arts program. Interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed for the purposes of analysis. Observations of the language arts program were recorded in the form of field notes, handwritten while observing. I also requested copies of selected documents which were supplied by the teacher.

A preliminary data analysis took place one third of the way into the study and served to generate feedback from the teacher and also to enrich the data. The final analysis occurred following data collection and took the form of a qualitative description of the program components and six themes illustrating the teacher's expressed philosophy and beliefs underlying the language arts program.

Limitations of the Study

The length of time spent in the research setting might be considered a limitation to the study. School holidays and teacher responsibilities outside the classroom interrupted and delayed the collection schedule. In this study I was dependent on the teacher for his time and cooperation in order to access data about the teacher's stated philosophy and beliefs.

As in most case studies, the generalizability of the

interpretation and conclusions is limited.

Significance of the Study

Teachers and curriculum planners striving to incorporate literature in their language arts programs are in need of theoretical and practical knowledge. This study offers a descriptive account of one language arts program and one teacher's praxis, highlighting the philosophy and beliefs underlying the program, and in so doing, adds to the existing knowledge of theory and practice.

In addition, this study suggests areas for further research by identifying a number of understandings and beliefs that accompany such an approach to teaching the language arts. In becoming aware of the philosophical considerations of one teacher, we may become cognizant of areas that warrant consideration in the research that attempts to help teachers develop and implement a literature-based language arts program.

Organization of the Study

The study is presented in five chapters. The first chapter introduces the study with a brief overview and provides a frame of reference for the study. Chapter Two contains a review of the literature that focuses on literature and the language arts. The research purpose and the methodology it necessitated are documented in the third chapter. Chapter Four presents the data in two parts, first a description of the language arts program studied and second, the

themes that represent the teacher's philosophy and beliefs impacting his language arts program. Chapter Five relates my reflections on the research and includes a summary of the study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter consists of a review of the literature that I chose to read in my attempt to understand the role of literature in the language arts. I wanted to become aware of the philosophical factors that might influence a literature-based program. My search led me to authors who were writing about children and literature, children's literature in the language arts, literary response, the concept of a response-centered curriculum, and evaluation of holistic language arts.

Response to Literature

> It is with thoughtful and personal response to reading that all who deal with the education of children ought really to be concerned. It is with "big ideas" and how one personalizes those "big ideas" that one must deal if young learners are to be helped to use reading experience for personal growth; to step to the music which each hears. (LePere, 1975, p. 476)

As a reader, each of us responds to a different drummer. Each individual responds to literature in an individual way. It is the reader's individual response that indicates both his/her understandings and the personal significance of the literature. Rosenblatt (1979) suggests that without personal significance the act of reading loses its most fundamental purpose and becomes a mechanical process. Reader response is not only the starting point for making meaning with text, it is also the reason why we approach the text in the first place and

is what gives significance to the act of reading. Response is both how and why we read.

The works of Paulo Freire, James Britton, and Louise Rosenblatt, among others discuss the concepts of literacy and literary transaction. In those works, the reading process is considered from a holistic stance, meaning the act of reading cannot be divorced from its greater whole, the act of literacy. This holistic perspective suggests that there is something more to literacy than the sum of its elements, reading and writing. Thus, reading and writing are holistic and transactional processes that are a part of a greater whole, literacy.

Literacy has crucial import to educators working with young children. Leading theorists on literacy, Freire, Britton, and Meek, all suggest that literacy is the key to understanding one's self and the world. Making sense of their world is of utmost importance and a major occupation of children (Wells, 1986). It is vital that they be able to utilize effectively all of the modes of literacy. To develop literacy children need to be able to collect information, determine its significance, and decide how they could use the information in order to act upon their world. Freire (1985) makes the following statements about literacy as a tool in understanding reality:

> The act of reading cannot be explained as merely reading words since every act of reading words implies a previous reading of the world and subsequent rereading of the world. There is a permanent movement back and forth between "reading" reality and reading words...(1985, p. 18)

To be able to read the world in order to read the word and in turn to

reread the world is to practice literacy in a way that makes children dynamic participants in their world.

Children bring to any situation previous knowledge of their world. In fact, that knowledge, gathered from life experiences is crucial to bringing meaning to the messages received in spoken, pictoral, or printed language. In her work with beginning readers Clay (1979) identifies lack of experiences as a major contributor to difficulties in learning to read.

> A second reason why children may not have the skills that are necessary for good progress in reading when they enter school is that they have not had adequate experiences in their preschool years. Their homes may not have provided a good range of interesting experiences appropriate to their developmental needs. More specifically, the child who has not had many opportunities to converse with adults will have limited language skills and will have difficulty in reading. The child who has not lived in a home where adults share books with children will have less skill in the perception of two-dimensional space than the average child. (Clay, 1979, p. 17)

Through literature the child may be introduced to vicarious experiences that will help him/her to understand experiences in the real world. Britton (1971) views literature as a potent source of fantasy that can be used by children in a playmaking sense through which they are able to "improvise freely upon events of the actual world and in doing so enable [themselves] to go back and meet the demands of real life more adequately (p. 45). In a recent article about children and their literary experiences in a Grade One classroom McConaghy (1985) describes several examples and writes that she

> . . . sensed that these children were beginning to use literature as it was originally intended, to serve as the means, not just for

> teaching reading and writing, but to understand life more fully. Even at this young age they were learning more about life through reading literature, and by rewriting the literature to create their own stories. (p. 353)

Literature and children interact in the process of becoming literate. Reading, in its holistic sense, is a part of the greater act of literacy; an act which involves the child in his/her dynamic reading the world, reading the word, and rereading the world (Freire, 1985). The child can and does use literature as a means of making sense of his/her world. Literature may become an extension of that world and literary response an initiation and indication of personal significance.

Rosenblatt (1976, 1982) presents reading in its most holistic, literate sense; as a transaction between the reader and the text. Rosenblatt (1982) sees reading as "a transaction, a two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances" (p. 269). In this transaction the reader must take a "stance" toward the text. The reader's stance will fall somewhere on the continuum between what Rosenblatt (1982) terms as "efferent . . . where attention focuses on accumulating what is to be carried away at the end of the reading . . . and aesthetic . . . where attention will shift inward, will center on what is being created <u>during</u> the actual reading" (p. 269). The stance will, in turn, determine the schemata that the reader calls forth in the transaction with the text. With these schemata the reader will construct meaning and, in the process, will react to the schematic content and meaning that he/she has

created. "There is not only the stream of choices and syntheses that construct meaning; there is also a stream of accompanying reactions to the very meaning being constructed" (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 270). Whether the stance taken is an efferent or an aesthetic one, the reactions of the reader play an integral part in the meaning making process.

Rosenblatt suggests that aesthetic evocation and response are the primary elements in the reading act and that the common notion that efferent understanding precedes aesthetic response should be rejected. It is the aesthetic stance, in shaping what is understood, that produces a meaning in which the efferent functions are intermingled. The development of aesthetic response, according to Rosenblatt, is the educator's first responsibility.

It is this aesthetic response that is the starting point for both the reader and the educator of children. The educator dealing with children, literacy, and literature needs to understand that the child's limited language abilities and immature cognitive strategies "in no way contradict the fact that they are living through aesthetic experiences, their attention focused on what, in their transaction with the words, they can see and hear and feel" (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 272).

Aesthetic evocation and response is at the root of the transaction between reader and text. It is equally as vital at a more global level and in its most holistic sense, as the reason for reading, without which the act of reading loses its significance. With this conception

of the reading process, response is seen as both the primary element of, and the impetus for, reading. It may follow, then, that in the teaching of children and reading, our first responsibility is to the evocation of, and the recognition of, the reader's aesthetic response.

Response-centered Curriculum

The available literature on literary response in language arts education, seems to be a conglomerate of principles and approaches borrowed from various disciplines such as literary criticism, developmental psychology, library science, bibliotherapy, and education itself. Within the education field the current view of literary response consists of a slow and tentative meeting of two perspectives: that of literary criticism at the college and high school level and that of literacy through literature for the very young. It seems possible that literary criticism is filtering down through the grades while the idea of literacy through literature is winding its way up.

The response-centered curriculum of Purves & Monson (1984) in addition to the writings of Benton & Fox (1985) and Gambell (1986) are evidence of the multidisciplinary approach to theories of literary response. Each draws on the various contributing disciplines as a basis for their approach to literary response. These writers as well as Huck (1976), Arbuthnot (1977), Vandergrift (1980), White (1976), and Rosenblatt (1976) advocate the use of literary response and the potential of literature to develop "human" and literate persons. Literary response theory is based on the belief and knowledge that

literature has this developmental potential. Rosenblatt (1976), in particular, has made an undeniable impact on the philosophy of literary response.

The acceptance and integration of Rosenblatt's theory of a transactional reader-text relationship is apparent in current studies and literature in the language arts. Also of influence is the work of Purves, who has attempted to implement the transactional literary response theory in the form of a response-centered curriculum. Purves and Monson (1984) suggest a system of categories with which to classify students' responses to literature. The categories include descriptive, analytic, classificatory, personal, interpretive, and evaluative. They outline the developmental trends in the responses of elementary and high school children, describing the "younger children as more literal and egocentric . . . and the older children as more abstract and formal" (p. 143). Benton and Fox (1985) in Teaching Literature: Nine to Fourteen also proposed a response-based curriculum and labelled response categories as picturing, anticipating and retrospecting, interacting, and evaluating. Even more recently, Gambell (1986) authored an entire issue of English Quarterly devoted to the subject of literature and literary response. His work offers both a descriptive and prescriptive outline of the literature curriculum in Canadian schools. In view of the theoretical and descriptive nature of the available literature it appears as though we have only begun to explore the possibilities and many facets of literary response in education.

Actual research studies on response are mostly descriptive, taking the form of case studies such as that of Crago and Crago (1983), of ethnographic research such as those of McConaghy (1985) and Hickman (1981), or quantitative studies done at the college or high school level that focus on the development of written response (Carlman and Sampson, 1982; Squire, 1964; Purves, 1968). Formal reviews of the literature and research on response have been done by Galda (1983), Hickman (1984), Purves and Beach (1972), and Gambell (1986). What appears to be lacking are research studies in the areas of 1) very young children and beginning readers and 2) the development of specific language ablities in responding to literature. However, we can see the beginnings of progress in these areas, especially in the works of Hickman and of Galda.

An excellent example of a comprehensive, descriptive study of literary response is "A New Perspective on Response to Literature: Research in an Elementary School Setting", a 1981 study by Hickman. Hickman began her article with a strong argument for a holistic, qualitative approach to researching children's responses to literature. She suggested that responses can be long-term, are not necessarily always verbal, and should be viewed in the naturalistic setting. The purpose of that particular research was to study children's responses in their natural setting, the classroom, and consider the levels and contexts in which these responses occur. In her analysis, Hickman strove to identify patterns and categories for response. She proceeded

by categorizing all events, both verbal and nonverbal, as follows:

1. Listening behaviors
2. Contact with books
3. Acting on the impulse to share
4. Oral responses
5. Actions and drama
6. Making things
7. Writing

Hickman listed those response categories in order of decreasing frequency and made special mention that impulse to share and oral response often occurred in conjunction with other categories. The timing of activities, the relationship between verbal and nonverbal modes, peer interaction, social climate, and familiarity with literature were found to have influence on the students' responses. The study revealed some age-related patterns of response for the three groups (K-1, 2-3, 4-5). All categories of response events were represented in all three groups but different levels in frequency, intensity, and importance of certain modes appeared to be characteristic of each group. Nonverbal, body responses and the integration of story into their dramatic play were characteristic of the youngest group. The 2-3 group exhibited responses that indicated their concern for their own accomplishment of independent reading skills while sharing and reading together. Hickman perceived a transitional quality to this stage -one of moving between the nonverbal K-1 and the independently verbal 4-5 groups. The oldest group was strongly characterized by their intense attention to books and their greater ability to perform tasks (especially in the verbal mode).

In addition to mode of response and age-related patterns, Hickman reported that context was of utmost importance to response. "It was obvious that most of the observable response events were tied to the settings in which they occurred. . . . Various expressions of response were either permitted by or facilitated by or generated by the climate of the school and the classroom" (p. 352). She described the kind of environment and teacher strategies that evidently contributed to response and concluded that "it was clear that the teacher had considerable power to influence expressions of response through ability to manipulate the classroom context" (p. 353). Hickman's study identified and confirmed age-related patterns and modes of response as well as illustrating once more the importance of response and the context, or classroom climate, in which it appears.

McConaghy (1985) categorized the written responses of a Grade 1 class as literal, role playing, and meaning making. She considered the written responses as indicators of children's choices within their individual contexts and as an expression of their literary experiences rather than indicators of language development. McConaghy suggested that we need to learn more about how we, as educators, could better facilitate our students' literary response.

Galda (1982) stated that teachers need to become more aware of the potential for teaching and learning that exists within their students' literary response and that it is with knowledge of those responses that teachers are able to plan learning experiences appropriate for their

students. Galda reported partial case studies of three young readers, and looked at each of their responses and the subsequent implications for instruction. Again, the emphasis was on facilitating, valuing, and capitalizing on the student's personal responses to the literature in order to assist in their literacy development. Galda urged teachers to take a holistic approach to the reading process and instruction.

In "Children's Responses to Literature" Studier (1981) offered some practical guidelines for conducting classroom research on children's responses. She contended that if teachers are going to teach literary appreciation and focus on their students' responses to literature, they need to know "how their students respond to literature and how to use this information in the classroom" (p. 431). In interpreting the responses Studier suggested that the teacher collect and compare students' written response with general guidelines of response patterns in order to determine which responses are typical and which are atypical. The guidelines were compiled from those of previous studies of upper elementary students. They were:

1. Their responses are primarily concerned with content, rather than form or style.
2. They are likely to concentrate on literal aspects of literature rather than making inferences.
3. They are capable of responding critically to literature.
4. They respond with a certain openness and are willing to reveal personal responses with little regard for social expectations (Studier, 1981, p. 432).

Studier claimed that this examination of responses reveals individual differences in levels of awareness, ability, and language development and suggested that teachers use this information to "guide individuals

in the greater use of their capacity for literary appreciation" (p. 435).

Studier's recognition of the importance of developing and explaining the methods of data analysis in ethnographic research is helpful and is a move in the direction of application of literary response theory, attempting to bring the classroom teacher and research closer together.

Crowhurst and Kooy (1986) provided us with an example of a study which looked at the direct application of response theory. "The Use of Response Journals in Teaching the Novel" offers a theory to practice model for teachers. The authors adopted Rosenblatt's (1976) transactional theory of response and put it into practice as they explored the use of response journals. The Grade 9 and 12 students involved in the Crowhurst & Kooy study wrote their journals, during the novel reading, in response to these prompts:

1. What impressed me in this section was...
2. I noticed...
3. I wonder about...
4. I predict...
5. I question...
6. I don't/now understand...(p. 257)

In the analysis of the collected data, journal entries were categorized and counted. The Crowhurst & Kooy (1986) categories included:

1. comments about the book's structure;
2. hypothesis about plot, characters, etc.;
3. personal responses about people and events;
4. comments about author's style (p. 258).

Results indicated that the younger (Grade 9) students showed greater frequency of hypothetical responses while the older (Grade 12) students tended to produce more responses related to style. A large number of personal responses were found in both groups. Crowhurst and Kooy identified response journals as a way to encourage and develop students' abilities to reflect and clarify their thoughts. The researchers also noted that the students came to class much better prepared to question and discuss with their teacher and classmates and were more confident of their own abilities. The teachers also benefited; in getting to know their students better through the responses, they were better able to assist in the students' learning.

Crowhurst and Kooy presented a descriptive account of the use of response journals in the secondary classroom. The significance of the study was its value as a model of applied literary response theory and its potential to generate similar studies at various grade levels.

Some research has been done in an effort to explore the interrelationships between literary response, comprehension, and schema theory. In a 1983 study, Cullinan, Galda, and Harwood explored the possibility of using the responses of upper elementary students as an indication of their comprehension abilities. They contended that the two processes, response and comprehension, are complementary ones and they attempted to illustrate this in their study. "The Reader and the Story: Comprehension and Response" contains a review of the existing approaches to reading comprehension and literary response culminating

with the assertion of the need to look at the interrelationship between the schema theory view of comprehension and literary response theory. An earlier article by Hacker (1980) "From Schema Theory to Classroom Practice" provides a clear overview of schema theory in relation to comprehending written text and discusses implications for education. In his view, schema theory supports a holistic, meaning-based approach to reading and at the same time makes bottom-up, or data-driven, processing more efficient for the reader, especially the beginning reader. The students' familiarity with story schemata and their ability to call up the appropriate schemata are seen as areas that can be enhanced through literature in the language arts curriculum. Comprehension instruction should be as holistic as possible. As well the teacher needs to be aware that traditional assessment techniques may actually hinder the reader's integration of knowledge with existing schemata. Hacker concluded the article by recognizing the vastly unexplored field of schema theory and implications for literacy development in the classroom.

In summary, the literature and research on literary response in the language arts; a) affirms the primary importance of response to the reading process and the growth of the individual, b) identifies various categories and levels of response, and c) confirms the importance of classroom climate and the role of the teacher in facilitating response. The theory of literary transaction provides a holistic basis for our approach to the reading process and literacy. Schema theory gives

structure and strategy to the reading process, accounting for the cognitive functions involved in making meaning and valuing the individuality of every transaction between reader and text. The implementation of these theories and research knowledge manifest themselves in a response-centered, literature-based curriculum.

The Role of Literature

For the majority of those writers who espouse a literature-based language arts curriculum, literature exists first and foremost as an art form. Because they percieve literature as art rather than content, for some writers the primary value of literature lies in its aesthetic qualities rather than its instructional potential. Rosenblatt (1982), Purves & Monson (1984), Huck (1982), among others, support the notion that literature is created for the purposes of aesthetic expression and aesthetic appreciation, not for didactic and utilitarian ends. Rosenblatt (1982) suggests that it is in the aesthetic response that the literature and the act of reading begin to take on meaning for the child. As well, most of the writers held a transactional view of reading. In the transaction between reader and text, knowledge of a personal, individual, and relative nature is generated by the reader. This knowledge may take form in what has come to be recognized and labeled as "response".

Thus, for writers such as Rosenblatt, Purves, and Huck, literature is art and the primary value of literature lies in its aesthetic qualities, the apprehension of those aesthetic qualities takes place in

the transaction between reader and text, and may be revealed in the reader's response to the literature.

The research literature is rich with examples of how literature and the accompanying literary experience have great potential for various aspects of human development (Freire, 1983; Meek, 1982). Within the reader's transaction with the text and as a result of the generation of both personal and shared knowledge, the reader has the opportunity to develop in various ways. Some writers, such as Gambell (1986) and McConaghy (1985), claim that reading literature leads to the development of one's understanding of self and world. Huck (1982) proposes that literature has the ability to "humanize" the reader. Crowhurst & Kooy (1986) and Purves & Monson (1984) recognize the potential for language and cognitive development. Lamme (1981) insists on both the affective and cognitive developmental potential of literature. While these writers focus on particular aspects of development, they also support the varied and rich potential of literature for development in a very holistic sense.

Belief in the value of literature as an art form and as a potential facilitator of human development support the understanding that the act of reading is a highly personal one and that the products of the transaction between reader and text are manifest in the reader's individual literary response. It is in this response that a teacher may discover what the reader has come to know and understand, both within their personal realm of being and as a part of the shared world.

Thus, literary response has the potential to become the curricular material around which a literature-based language arts curriculum is centered (Hickman, 1980; Purves & Monson, 1984; Benton & Fox, 1985; Galda, 1982).

In a curriculum where the student's literary response is viewed as central, the role of literature is to evoke the student's response. The response, once evoked, may act as a resource for the learner and for the teacher. Recent studies of literary response in the language arts have focused on the potential of response as a resource. Crowhurst & Kooy (1985) studied the use of response journals with young adults, suggesting the potential of response as an indicator of the students' comprehension competencies as well as a vehicle for further comprehension learning. Cullinan, Galda, & Harwood (1983) also supported the use of response as an indication of students' comprehension abilities. A study by Galda (1982) illustrated how literary response can provide teachers with valuable information about the literary understandings of their students. Empirical studies claim that responses may reveal the existence of story schema or the reader's implicit understanding of story grammar (Sawyer, 1987). According to Studier (1981) and Hickman (1984) literary response can be a rich source of information of both cognitive and affective development. In essence, the reader's various forms of knowledge may be revealed in his/her literary response. Therefore, that response may act as an indicator of development and competencies.

Utilizing response as curricular material for evaluative purposes requires the teacher and student to acquire certain abilities. Ammon (1983) suggested that if the orientation toward language and language learning is a holistic one then the same orientation must be taken when evaluating. As always, the evaluation process must fit the curriculum, not the reverse. A response-centered curriculum requires an evaluative approach that takes into account the subjective, intuitive, and individualistic nature of literary response.

The writers who have developed response-centered literature-based curricula are concerned that, for many teachers, the teaching of reading has become an end in itself and that this approach drives teachers to utilize literature for didactic purposes in the acquisition of reading skills (Hardt, 1983). Pillar (1983) cautioned that it must always be kept in mind that literature does not exist for the purposes of skills instruction but rather for appreciation, enjoyment, and aesthetic growth. Pillar supported the implementation of a literature-based program founded on the principle of the child as a natural learner who brings unique significance and meanings to each literacy event.

A particular view of literature, of literary response, and of the language arts curriculum shapes the role of literature in that curriculum. These writers seemed to be suggesting that, with an increased understanding of literature as an art form, of aesthetic response as vital to literacy acts, of the value of literary response

in the curriculum, and the recognition of the teacher's role as facilitator, a literature-based and response-centered language arts curriculum has the potential to meet the literacy needs of students.

Evaluation of Holistic Language Arts

It was apparent to me that our view of the language learner was changing and that innovations were taking place in the language arts curriculum and in its implementation. These changes were evidenced in a grassroots movement of classroom teachers and in the written works of educational theorists such as Margaret Meek, James Britton, and James Moffet. For the most part, these educational theorists were proposing an approach to the teaching of language arts that was somewhat non-traditional. Moffet & Wagner (1983) used the terms individualization, interaction, and integration to describe one such language arts curriculum. Ammon (1983) used the term "holistic reading/language arts program", while Goodman (1986) labeled the approach as "whole language". Whatever the label, the innovations involved a move toward a more learner-centered, process-oriented, and integrated approach to the language arts curriculum. In that approach, it was believed that language learning takes place when children use language in a functional and interactive way within the more natural context of purposeful communication (Ammon, 1983).

Teachers implementing a non-traditional approach to the language arts curriculum needed to know how to be accountable and how to evaluate their students' progress and abilities in a way that was

compatible with the program philosophy. The current literature on evaluation of the language arts offered information on how to assess students progress within a more holistic, process-oriented, and integrated approach (such as the response-centered, literature-based program).

Various labels were used in reference to the particular type of evaluation and included: diagnosis by observation (Cunningham, 1982), informal evaluation (Ammon, 1983), naturalistic assessment (Moore, 1983), kidwatching (Goodman, 1985), and formative evaluation (Cross, 1987). The most common and generic label appeared to be "informal evaluation", a term which almost all of the authors used at one time or another in the articles. But again, whatever the label, some basic principles or themes were common. Although the following themes by no means paint the whole picture in great detail, or include every opinion, or provide a comparative analysis, they may serve to give an overview of the collective voice on informal evaluation within holistic language arts.

1. The testing must fit the teaching. Moore (1983) presented an argument for "naturalistic reading comprehension assessment for evaluating those behaviors that elude quantification" (p. 957). Bussis & Chittenden (1987) claimed that testing methodology did not reflect the advances made in our understanding of language learning. The cry for accountability has caused educators to focus on the quantifiable aspects of language learning but " . . . teachers and administrators

must always be aware that tests provide only one piece of information" (Searle & Stevenson, 1987). What these and other writers seemed to be saying was that educators must keep in mind what they know about how children learn language when they evaluate language growth and that the focus and method of evaluation must be compatible with the teaching and learning.

2. The "whole language" approach needs a different method of evaluation. Pinnel (1985) claimed that if our curriculum focuses on the social functions and meanings of language, then an effective way to monitor language development "is to observe children in a systematic way" (p. 58) for the purpose of determining what the language learner can do with language. Dietz (1987) gave an account of her struggle to evaluate her students' progress in writing by focusing on the writing process rather than the end product. An interactive, holistic language arts program calls for an approach to evaluation in which evaluation takes place for the purposes of further language learning and growth (Ammon, 1983; Moffet & Wagner, 1983). Samway (1987) stated that "traditional forms of evaluation inevitably limit themselves to the final product, in the process mangling the complexities of all that goes into being a reader and writer" (p. 298). These authors appeared to be promoting methods of evaluation that were formative in nature rather than summative, and that focused on the abilities, rather than the deficits of the learner.

3. The evaluation of language learning must be in the context of a

"real language" situation. Moffet & Wagner (1983) and Ammon (1983) both drew attention to the learning potential of evaluation if done in the context of authentic communication acts, or, real and purposeful language use. Due to the transactional nature of reading, it is most reliable and realistic to observe and assess how students deal with text within the total context of the reading act (before, during, and after) while taking into consideration both the student and the text (Watson, 1985). Barnes (1986), in an article about the informal assessment of reading, stated that "assessment should occur while students read books and write stories - not while doing subskill activities" (p. 42). What these writers, along with Genishi (1985), Hickman (1985), Pinnel (1985), and Samway (1987), seem to be saying is that the observation and assessment of language growth should take place in the context of the students' natural and functional language use.

4. Informal evaluation means the teacher is an observer. According to Almy & Genishi (1979), observation, recording, and analysis are the keys to effective informal evaluation. Watson (1985) claimed that "classroom observation offers a natural, positive and professional way of gathering information" (p. 127). Hickman (1985) and Ammon (1983) focused on the teacher's observation and analysis of student response to literature. Black (1979) developed a checklist for teachers to use as a guide for refining and recording what they can see and hear as their students' language competencies. Teachers' "own

observations, anecdotal records, conference notes, checklists, and records provide a valuable source [of information]" (Searle & Stevenson, 1987, p. 284). These writers were suggesting that observation (and the accompanying analysis) is the "how to" of informal evaluation.

5. Formative evaluation involves the learner. Stewig (1980), Moffet & Wagner (1983), and Cramer (1982) appeared to see great value in the students' involvement in the evaluation process. Moffet & Wagner (1983) suggested that teachers should be able to evaluate the effectiveness of their language arts curriculum by how well the students engage in self-evaluation. The element of self-evaluation allows students and teachers to collaborate in the evaluation process and in working together, have a better understanding of the students' languaging capabilities and needs. What these writers seemed to be saying was that, in part, language learning occurs through a formative process of self-evaluation.

The current literature dealing with evaluation within a whole language program proposed that 1) the testing must fit the teaching, 2) traditional formal evaluation is not suitable for a whole language approach, 3) evaluation must be done "in context", 4) informal evaluation means the teacher is an observer, and finally, 5) formative evaluation involves the learner. In addition, researchers and teachers must collaborate in an effort to generate evaluation practices that are credible and at the same time do not undermine the the principles and

goals of the language arts program (Quellmaz, 1984; Shapiro, Lukasevich, & Shapiro, 1986). As Moore (1981) pointed out, the issue of naturalistic evaluation is in need of some strong leadership.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology of the study. Many decisions must be made in the course of a research project and I have attempted to relate those decisions and the rationale behind them. This chapter also recounts the chronology of the research study and it concludes with an overview.

Research Design

The utilization of ethnographic research tools is appropriate in research situations that are qualitative in nature; where one is seeking information about the qualities of any particular phenomena that occur within a context from which they cannot be divorced without alteration. The classroom is one such situation.

> Qualitative researchers go to the particular setting under study because they are concerned with context. They feel that action can best be understood when it is observed in the setting in which it occurs. . . . To divorce the act, word, or gesture from its context is, for the qualitative researcher, to lose sight of significance. (Bogdan & Knopp-Biklen, 1982, p. 27)

In studying a literature-based language arts program in action I was dealing with complex and varied social phenomena--phenomena which were inextricably imbedded in their context and which could be accessed through the use of various procedures common to ethnographic research. "Ethnography . . . allows us to explore in minute and concrete detail

the highly complex series of phenomena which operate in and around the classroom" (Wilcox, 1982, p. 478).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe one Grade Six teacher's philosophy and beliefs that impacted his literature-based language arts program. The study focused on the teacher's articulated philosophy and beliefs, and their manifestation in the classroom language arts program. In the process, the researcher investigated how that teacher diagnosed needs, planned for learning, assessed student progress, and reported to parents and administrators on the language arts capabilities of students. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. What does this literature-based language arts program entail?
2. What philosophy and beliefs underlie this teacher's language arts program?

It was anticipated that the composite answers to these questions would generate descriptive contexts for each other. The description of the components and activities involved in the program would provide a context for the philosophy and beliefs of the teacher and, vice versa, the relating of philosophy and beliefs would provide a context for the program components.

Site and Participant Selection

In the third week of January 1987 I began the search for a setting

in which to conduct my graduate research in language arts education. A total of eight elementary language arts classrooms were considered in the search for the appropriate research site and participant. These classrooms had been suggested by a language arts consultant in the local public school system when I requested a list of programs that might be considered "literature-based". Following telephone conversations with each of the teachers, three classrooms were chosen for visitation. Out of those three, one was chosen as the research setting and permission was requested.

There were two criteria on which to base the site selection. First, the classroom was to be an upper elementary language arts program. Second, the program was to be based on literature as the primary curricular material rather than a published language arts series. With regards to finding a suitable key informant, or teacher, again there were two criteria on which to base the selection. The first criteria was that, on first impression, the teacher appeared to be able to reflect on his or her teaching and articulate his or her philosophy with a considerable amount of confidence and ease. The second criteria was that the teacher was willing to commit a great deal of time (in addition to regular classroom hours) to the study. This last criterion proved to be crucial as two weeks into the collection of my data it became apparent that, in that particular setting, sufficient teacher-time was not available. The kind of information that I was seeking needed to come from the teacher during time out of the language

arts program. Regretfully, in this setting, teacher time was at a definite premium and thus restricted my study too much. Through mutual agreement, the teacher and I decided to discontinue the research in that setting. The situation heightened my awareness of just how crucial the teacher's commitment of time and energy was to my study and the successful collection of data.

I resumed my search for a suitable research site and contacted two more classroom teachers, both of whom I visited. Of the two classrooms, one met all of the criteria, including that of the commitment of teacher-time. In the second week of March I began collecting data in the new setting, which proved satisfactory for my research purposes. This particular teacher, Brian, was reflective and articulate as well as very generous with his time for the purposes of my research.

Brian (a fictitious name) had taught for twelve years in a large public school system. Although he had always taught at the upper elementary level, Brian had changed schools and grades a number of times. In addition, he had attempted to explore and develop different curricular areas within his teaching. For the past three or four years Brian's focus had been on the language arts, in particular novel study and writing processes, as he attempted to develop an approach to the language arts that was compatible with his philosophy and beliefs. In this process, the works of John Stewig and Donald Graves served as constant references for Brian. At the point of my research Brian was

continuing to develop his own language arts program and was beginning an attempt to write it up for the benefit of other teachers.

Brian's classroom was located in a large city school that was, in turn, part of a large public school system. The school had in excess of twenty-five staff members and over four hundred students from ECS (kindergarten) to Grade Six.

Role of the Researcher

I adopted the role of passive participant observer (Spradley, 1980) while collecting data in the classroom and attempted to establish myself in the eyes of the teacher and students as a researcher rather than as a non-practicing teacher. I knew that in order to procure the kind of data I desired, I would need to appear at once, both knowledgeable and naive. I believed it was necessary for the teacher to see me as having a sufficient enough understanding of teaching language arts that he would assume we shared common ground. At the same time, it was necessary that he see me as needing to be informed about his particular approach to teaching the language arts.

His awareness that I was a teacher was inescapable and he would therefore assume that we had common ground from which we could quickly come to some basic understandings about language arts education and teaching in general. This common ground helped us to move easily into more particular, detailed information that was not previously known to me. In other words, the common ground facilitated the collection of my data about the philosphy and beliefs that impacted his program, but it

was those beliefs and that philosophy of which I was truly naive.

I definitely wanted the teacher to perceive me as "needing to be informed" of his beliefs and philosophy as well as the practices that were a part of his language arts program. I began with my appearance and tried to look less like a fellow teacher or visiting consultant. I wore very casual clothes, often sat on a table or desk, and wandered in and out of the classroom. In addition, I was able to establish a certain amount of perceived ignorance by disclosing that I had not taught in upper elementary before and that this particular approach to teaching the language arts was not common, thus it was unlikely that I would be familiar with all that it entailed.

Perhaps most importantly, and most difficult for me, I attempted to remain silent. I believed that it was my role to listen and not to engage in a dialogue with my informant. During our interview times my contributions were minimal and occurred only when I deemed it necessary to suggest a topic or seek clarification. Sometimes I asked for clarification on a point made during an interview; at other times I sought background on a classroom incident that I had observed; but for the most part, the teacher articulated his beliefs and philosophy voluntarily and with ease.

Spradley (1979) indicates that, in the ethnographic interview the researcher must not begin with preconceived notions but rather a "naive ignorance" about the research topic. As well, the researcher must make it the informant's role, not merely to offer information, but to offer

the information that the informant deems as important. "Work with subjects begins with preconceived ideas; work with informants begins with a naive ignorance. Subjects do not define what is important for the investigator to find out; informants do" (p. 29). In this study, interview participants were viewed as informants. Fairly relaxed, unstructured interviews served to bring forth whatever information the informants felt was important.

Research Schedule

Classroom visits began on March 9, 1987 and continued at a rate of two or three a week until June 2, 1987. The schedule was flexible and worked around interruptions including various classroom activities, an Easter vacation, and a week-long Spring break. My visits to the classroom took place in the morning, usually from just after class commencement until lunchtime dismissal. All of the interviews except one took place during these morning visitations. The teacher generously offered to spend any of his spare teaching time, scheduled or not, talking with me. As his designated spares were scheduled for Tuesday and Thursday mornings most of the interview sessions took place then and lasted anywhere from 25 to 45 minutes. A vacant reception room or the teacher's professional library provided private and quiet places in which I could tape record the interview sessions.

Nearing the end of May I felt that I had collected a sufficient amount of data and I made my last classroom visit in the first week of June. I asked the students and the teacher to choose fictitious names

for themselves, thanked the teacher and told him I would be in touch.

At a later date, I asked him to read over and comment on what I had written about his philosophy and beliefs and about his language arts program. Brian's response to my data analysis (Chapter Four) was very positive, indicating to me that he felt I had reported on his language arts program with accuracy and captured the essence of his philosophy and beliefs. Particularly rewarding to me, was the following comment made by Brian in his written response to my analysis. He wrote, "Your work has really helped me . . . I can honestly say, Brenda, that your work has been the most useful thing to happen to me in quite some time. Hopefully, I have returned at least part of the favor." This and other similar comments served to alleviate my fear of being a parasitic researcher preying on an already busy and hard-working school teacher. It became apparent to me that, from Brian's perspective his offering of time and energy for the purposes of my research project was reciprocated in the benefits he reaped through reflecting upon his practice and articulating his philosophy and beliefs.

Procedures for Data Collection

Agar (1986) describes ethnographic research as work that "requires an intensive personal involvement, an abandonment of traditional scientific control, an improvisational style to meet situations not of the researcher's making, and an ability to learn from a long series of mistakes" (p. 12). Within this context, participant observation

utilizes various tools for data collection such as observation, informant interviewing, document analysis, respondent interviewing, and participation with self-analysis during any one session (McCall & Simmons, 1969). The complex nature of my research caused me to utilize a variety of data collection tools within the ethnographic tradition.

Interviews. A total of thirteen interviews were conducted during the course of the study. Ten of those sessions, ranging from 25 to 65 minutes, were conducted with the teacher as informant. All, except for two, were audiotaped and later transcribed by me. Two of those sessions were not taped because the teacher entered into the interview spontaneously and it was not convenient to set up the tape recorder. I wrote out by hand as much of what he was saying as I could.

I also conducted one interview with each of two mothers of Brian's students. Again, these interviews were unstructured and my purpose was to get the informant to talk as much as possible. Together, the teacher and I chose two parents from his class that we felt would be able to articulate their perceptions of the language arts program with regards to their child. Although all parents had been given the opportunity to consent to an interview, few indicated their consent. Two mothers agreed and were interviewed for 30 to 45 minutes, one in her home on her day off work and one during the morning while she was at the school doing volunteer work. These sessions were not audiotaped as that was deemed as intimidating, possibly causing them to restrict their comments in some way. The mothers seemed to enjoy talking about

their children and the language arts program. They both expressed strong approval of the program and identified many positive effects that it had on their children.

Another unstructured interview lasting 30 minutes was conducted with the two administrators, the principal and the assistant principal. I asked them to talk to me about that teacher's language arts program and made handwritten notes of their comments. They both contributed and at times entered into brief dialogue with each other. They appeared enthusiastic about the program and identified what they saw as the strengths of the program and of the teacher.

The interviews with my key informant, Brian, provided a wealth of rich data. The additional interviews with the secondary informants, the parents and the administrators, offered a type of confirmation of my perceptions of the program in general. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) suggest that "in social research, if one relies on a single piece of data there is the danger that undetected error in the data-production process may render the analysis incorrect. If, on the other hand, diverse kinds of data lead to the same conclusion, one can be a little more confident in that conclusion" (p. 198). From an ethnographic perspective the three different interview sources helped to provide triangulation, or, a validation check. By collecting data concerning the same phenomenon (in this case, Brian's language arts program) from three different sources, I was able to confirm my findings.

Field notes. In the role of a passive participant, each time I visited the classroom I took fieldnotes, writing down what I saw happening, what I heard the teacher and the students say, and my own perceptions as an observer that I felt were of significance. I sat at the back of the classroom and students did not seem to be aware of me until I moved within their field of vision or until the teacher made specific reference to me (less than once a day).

During the course of the research only a small number of students made comments to me about my work. Two students who sat near the door usually greeted me as I entered the classroom in the morning. One novel study group that I often observed commented that they liked to have me come and listen to their group. Two students made reference to the great amount that I would write, "Just like us," one said. Although my interaction with the students was minimal, I felt very comfortable talking to them and asking them questions about what they were doing. The relaxed atmosphere and freedom of movement in the classroom facilitated my inconspicuousness, allowing for an unencumbered operation of the program.

Conferences. Seven conferences between teacher and students were audiotaped and transcribed. In four of those conferences the teacher discussed a novel study exam the students had written for one of the four novels. One conference with Brian and a single student was audiotaped and transcribed as well as two group conferences with the teacher and a regular writing conference group that met on Thursdays.

At times the students seemed very aware of the tape recorder and later the teacher commented on their "perfomance" for my benefit. This did not overly concern me as it was only mild and I was most interested in focusing on the teacher's, not the students', comments and behavior during the conferences. The transcriptions provided an example of the teacher's interaction with students in that particular context and a general idea of how that particular component, conferences, operated within the total program.

Documents. The teacher willingly shared copies of various documents pertaining to his planning, evaluating, and reporting procedures. Copies of work and the anecdotal records for two students were also collected by the researcher. From Brian's perspective, his documents were very much in the process of development. I noticed that the letter outlining the program that was sent home to parents was changed from year to year and that Brian revised his checklists every year. In consideration of their transitional nature, I did not judge it ethical, in a sense, to publish any of Brian's planning or evaluation documents. And it would be a study in itself to examine and document his revisionary process.

Procedures for Data Analysis

In this study analysis took the form of perusing transcripts and fieldnotes until themes emerged. During data collection I was aware that, in some way, data analysis began to take place in the form of interpretation. My own interpretation of the phenomena that I observed

produced particular data. In essence, data analysis took place on a continuous basis as the research evolved, beginning even as early as data collection. An article by Hansen (1984) was especially illuminating for me as it brought to light the possible influence that one's "frame of reference" might have on their perceptions.

Hansen (1984) began his article with a parable that caused me to reflect on the notion that a particular frame of reference affects our perception of the world. The parable tells the story of one man's impressions of an orchestral performance of Schubert's Symphony No. 8, "The Unfinished". The man, a visiting evaluator of school administration, was given complimentary tickets for an evening at the symphony, an event he had never before attended. His particular frame of reference as an administrative efficiency expert and a virgin symphony attendee caused him to report the following impressions of the performance.

> For considerable periods in the symphony the four oboe players had nothing to do. The number should be reduced and their work should be more conveniently spread over the whole symphony, thus eliminating peaks of activity.
>
> All the twelve violins were playing identical notes. This seems unnecessary duplication. The staff of this section should be drastically cut and, if a large volume of sound is required, this could be obtained by means of an electronic amplifier.
>
> Much effort was absorbed in the playing of demi-quavers. This seems to be an excessive refinement and it is recommended that all notes be rounded up to the nearest semi-quaver. If this were done, it should be possible to use trainees and lower grade operators.
>
> There seems to be too much repetition of some of the musical passages. No useful purpose is served by repeating with horns the

> passage that has already been handled by the strings. If all such redundant passages were eliminated, the total concert time of two hours would have been reduced to some twenty minutes and there would have been no need for an interval. If the composer Schubert had attended to these matters, he would probably have been able to finish his symphony. (p. 58-9)

One does not need to be an avid symphony attendee or a musician to be aware of the visitor's lack of sensitivity to the aesthetic value of a symphony performance. His particular frame of reference, or perceptual glasses, caused him to view and interpret the musical event in a particular way. Likewise, an observer's individual frame of reference would generate unique perceptions and interpretations of a phenomenon such as a language arts program.

Of course Hansen did not intend that I use his parable in relation to my research in the language arts, and while acknowledging that his intended point was most assuredly otherwise, I will reflect on his parable with regards to my research.

It struck me that the same situation involving contrasting perceptions and interpretations could easily occur in relation to the research setting, more specifically, the language arts classroom that I studied. The implications are that what was perceived to be happening in one language arts program could differ widely between different observers due to their unique frames of reference. The realization brought to light once more the individual and personal qualities of perception and interpretation and how those qualities were integral to my study.

In addition to the hidden analysis that takes place due to

perceptual interpretations, a more formalized, preliminary analysis of the data was performed approximately one third of the way into the study and presented to the key informant in the form of a letter (Appendix 2). In her 1986 study Clandinin communicates her ongoing data analysis to her key informants in the form of a letter. She follows the letter with a dialogue session, recording her informants' responses to the data analysis which forms the content of the letter. Although Clandinin's written research does not include an indepth account of the rationale for her technique, it seemed to work well for the purposes of her research and I chose to employ a similar procedure in this study. I wrote a letter to Brian, containing my preliminary analysis. Brian read the letter, made his own notations and then shared his responses to the letter during one of our interview sessions.

It was felt that the literary form of a letter would ease both the writing and the reading. It was easier for me to write down and explain the initial themes and the ensuing questions in the somewhat informal, conversational manner of a letter addressed to my key informant. I also felt that from the perspective of the informant, the reading of an informal account might prove less threatening than a more formal analysis and the conversational tone might facilitate less inhibited feedback. Judging from the richness and length of Brian's response, the procedure was an effective one. It served to enrich the data and refine my analysis.

Another consideration was that of the researcher and key informant relationship. At that point I had worked very hard to establish my role in the interviews as a person needing to be informed and as a listener. I was concerned that a long session of me talking to my key informant (in essence, I would be informing him), would jeopardize my image as the uninformed. By writing him a letter which he read in private, away from the research setting, and by letting him respond during an interview session, I felt I was able to preserve the established roles of informant as talker and researcher as listener.

The preliminary analysis and the informant's resulting comments served to enrich and verify the emerging themes, some of which in the ensuing collection and the final analysis underwent a metamorphisis. Some of the preliminary themes changed into sub-themes or merged with other themes, took on greater depth and significance or became inconsequential. Sometimes it was simply a different label for the same theme.

In the final data analysis six themes are identified, described, and supported with examples from the data. I found that the interview transcripts provided the richest source of data for my study. The fieldnotes and documents functioned more as back up or verification of the interview statements. In other words, was what my key informant said really happening? In most cases the answer was yes. Any anomalies were noted and examined but were judged as minor and are not documented in this study. What is documented in this study are

descriptions of the components of this particular language arts program and six themes that were seen to be representative of Brian's philosophy and of his approach to teaching the language arts. The descriptions and themes are presented in Chapter Four: Data Analysis.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis

This chapter presents the data in two parts. First, descriptions of the classroom, the language arts activities, and the teacher. I have attempted to spare the reader lengthy, detailed description and yet still provide enough information to develop a context for the less concrete data. The second part of the data analysis is made up of six themes that characterize the philosophy and beliefs of the teacher in the language arts program studied. Each theme begins with a quotation from the transcripts of my interviews with Brian. Quotes and individual data items are referenced within the analysis by a code which indicates first, the type of data (i for interview, fn for fieldnotes, d for document) second, the date of collection and last, the page number. For example, (i May 21 p5). The chapter concludes with a summary.

Descriptions

The Classroom

The visual effect of the classroom was obviously not Brian's major concern. It was not "decorated" like many classrooms, with colorful and visually appealing pictures and posters. It was not tidy and neat. It was not a showcase of spatial organization or an example of

excellent housekeeping. It looked busy and "lived in".

Twenty-three flat topped desks with detached chairs were loosely arranged side by side in short rows, three rows facing the front and one row on each side facing inward. In the center of the desks was an overhead projector and at the front was a large table. The teacher's desk was located in the back corner of the classroom, in front of some shelves and next to a filing cabinet, a table, and a computer. Around the sides of the classroom were various tables, shelves, and cubbyholes which were littered with papers, student belongings, projects, textbooks, and novels. There was one small window, which did not open, in one corner of the room, behind some shelves. The doorway was very large as it was actually one quarter of each wall that met at the corner, opening on one side into the next classroom and on the other side into the library. A low, freestanding cupboard with a sink and drinking fountain sat in the middle of this shared doorway. The design was partially a self-contained and partially an open-area classroom.

The library was located in the center of a number of classrooms of similar design and contained individual study carrels and tables which were frequently utilized by Brian's students for individual or group work. On the outside walls of each classroom were bulletin boards that were visible from the library. Each class had a designated bulletin board on which to display their work. Brian told me that he had deliberately chosen the smallest one for his class.

The bulletin board space within Brian's classroom was

approximately three quarters of the wall space, the majority of which had something posted on it. One wall and parts of another were covered with handprinted charts that included the qualities of an independent learner, rules about snacks in the classroom, classroom laws, guidelines for class monitors, weekly duty roster, expectations for starting the day, homework expectations, detention illiciting behaviors, list of members of daily conference groups, outline of the writing process, ideas for novel assignments, the format of a book report, an example of a story web of a novel, list of rules to learn by, possible topics for class magazine, a computer-printed calendar for the month. Some of these items dealt with classroom organization and student responsibility while others dealt with the processes of learning and working in the language arts. All of the items were functional in an educational sense. None of them were decorative in appearance or purpose.

The other displays on the remaining two walls consisted of student work. Some burlap weavings were on one wall, sharing the space with some student writing on various topics and a large hand drawn poster depicting the teacher. On the other wall some students had created a display of the student work generated in the course of completing three different novel studies. One bulletin board was used for social studies topics, at first a display of newspaper clippings about a current event of interest and later, an arrangement of Indonesian photographs and artifacts contributed by a student. Other than a few

alphabet cards, nothing posted in the room was commercially produced. Everything was created by teacher or students as a direct contribution to or result of their learning activities.

Although the walls were by no means bare, the classroom did not appear as "decorated", either. Brian once mentioned to me that he had trouble with bulletin boards and, we agreed that for him, they were not a priority. What was a priority was the explicit display of the functional uses of language and information to aid students in language processing. Thus, in appearance, the classroom was not a visually pleasing, decorative display but a functional arrangement of furniture and print, both facilitating the achievement of the major objective of language learning.

The Students as a Class

The students in this class appeared to come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and home situations. Through Brian's comments about his students and their writing, I learned that some of them were experiencing disruptive, unstable family situations with little support for their education, while others came from stable, comfortable and supportive homes. Most of Brian's students came from the surrounding community and only a few took the city transit bus to and from school.

Brian's class had a disproportionate number of "low academic" students in comparison with the class next door, which was made up of students who were taking French language instruction, and were mostly

"middle to high academic" students. Three of Brian's students were a part of a Reading Resource class and were not present for most of the morning while I visited and collected data. Those students and a few others were considering a vocational program in Junior High school. Brian did mention, however, that he thought some of his students were at an academic level that would challenge the students in the class next door.

The overall personality of the students as a classgroup was easy-going and non-competitive. In my fieldnotes, I have very few records of class members making negative comments or the kind of "put-downs" so often made by students in classes of that age group. For the most part, students exhibited tolerance, respect, and appreciation for each other.

The Teacher

Brian functioned in a role that facilitated the total phenomena of his classroom and the language learning of his students. He was there to orchestrate the individual elements involved in the attempt to create and maintain the harmony. At the same time, Brian attempted to work with the individual abilities and capitalize on the strengths of each student.

As a teacher, Brian was very relaxed and spontaneous in his manner. He appeared to be very willing to be "human" in front of his students, open to admitting his strengths and weaknesses and candidly sharing his feelings and opinions. Brian was not "a good speller" and

used his dependence on the dictionary as an example of developing coping skills for his students. He responded to their stories and comments with candidness and honesty, often showing genuine appreciation for the students' sense of humor. Good-naturedness prevailed as he hugged students and affectionately told them that he wasn't sure they were worth all the trouble they caused.

He was very easy-going and energetic. My visits and interviews never seemed to be impositions and when I greeted him as I arrived every morning with "Good morning. How are you?", he always replied with an enthusiastic "Fantastic!". At recess time, if he was not out playing catch with some of his students and he came into the staff room, he would sit for only a few minutes and then dash off to do something or to talk to a student. Brian talked excitedly about ski trips and camp-outs with his students. As well, he was involved in athletics and team sports outside of school, both as a player and as a coach.

From a professional standpoint, Brian had taken control of his own learning and held himself accountable. In his twelve years of teaching he had set goals for his own development, choosing a particular area of his teaching to work on. For instance, one year he decided to get his language arts program organized and spent the year reading professional literature, writing down his ideas, and collaborating on a language arts project with a fellow teacher. Since then, he had been involved in a language arts support group for upper elementary teachers. At the

point of my research Brian was attempting to develop a model of his approach to the language arts and had already begun to write down, in the form of a mind-map, the various elements of his program and his objectives.

One of Brian's most noticeable attributes was his inclination to be self-reflective. It was continual and instigated action on his part. Brian was constantly reflecting on his own planning and teaching in a critically analytic manner, examining what had taken place and making plans for future revisions. In his interactions with students, while teaching, and during interviews with me, he articulated his reflections and shared his ideas for possible changes. One day a student said to him, "You're always telling us what you'll do next year." And at one point I said to Brian, "Have you always been this way?" I could detect a note of bewilderment in his reactions to both comments and he seemed to be wondering, "Is there any other way for me to be?" It did not appear to be a conscious decision on his part, to develop the capacity to be self-reflective, but it was a practice that definitely had a tremendous impact on his teaching. On a day-to-day basis he engaged in his own professional development through self-evaluation and the improvement of his program.

Classroom Organization

Although at any one time, Brian's students may have each been engaged in individual and different activities, they were for the most part, in harmony with the functioning of the group as a whole. For

example, within the designated individual reading time students may have been in their desks reading silently, reading aloud to a friend, discussing a passage with someone, or doing what appeared to be some thinking about the book that was open in front of them. In addition, they may have been reading anything from social studies notes to a novel to a skateboard magazine. Many different approaches to the task were being attempted simultaneously but the overall effect was harmonious. This harmony through diversity was characteristic of Brian's language arts program in general. Although they all shared common objectives within the language arts program, the total group was seldom performing the same task, or in a similar way, at the same time.

Brian's students experienced a great deal of autonomy and freedom of movement in the classroom. The members of the class formed and reformed groups both spontaneously and under the teacher's direction. While some were working in pairs, one may be working alone, and others were collaborating in a spontaneous group effort. Students were free to move around the classroom and interact with other students. For instance, students frequently got up from their desks to obtain books, consult a dictionary or a fellow writer, get a drink, go to the washroom, read to a friend, or use the library. Occasionally it was suggested by the teacher but the students often chose, on their own initiative, to work in the library--individually or with others. During the time that I observed in Brian's classroom, it could be considered an unusual and notable event if at any one time everyone had

been doing the same thing. So much so that one such instance is documented, starred, and underlined in my fieldnotes.

The students seemed to be aware of their responsibilities and the limits on their behavior. The expectation seemed to be that the students would do whatever they felt was necessary to help them in their learning and at the same time maintain group harmony. It was only when this group harmony was disrupted that Brian stepped in. Once, he mentioned to me that, ideally, he saw his role minimized to that of problem solver. In other words, the students would function so independently that Brian would become a trouble-shooter and intervene in their interactions only when necessary, in order to facilitate their learning.

The daily plan. A daily plan, available to all class members, acted as a notification of the day's activities. Although no two daily plans were ever exactly the same in the three months that I observed, a typical plan for a morning might look like this:

9:00 Planning/Reading
9:15 Conference Group
9:30 Writing
10:10 Sharing
10:30 Recess
10:45 Reading Groups (Novel Study)
11:30 Social Studies
12:00 Lunch

Each morning a student would copy the plan from Brian's teacher planbook onto the overhead projector for the class members to read and/or copy into their notebooks. This plan was projected on the

screen for a minimum of about fifteen minutes or until someone switched the overhead projector off.

The first half of the morning happened fairly consistently as shown. The portion following recess normally included anywhere from thirty to seventy minutes of Reading Groups (Novel Study) and the remaining time of five to forty-five minutes was used for math or social studies, the latter of which consisted mainly of reading, writing, and discussions. On Tuesdays and Thursdays the sharing time was replaced with music class. Only once during my visits did a designated language arts time occur in the afternoon. Reading, however, was often used as a filler activity for a few minutes before music, recess, or lunch. There appeared to be a great deal of flexibility within the plan and the class members seemed to adjust to any changes with ease once they were aware of them. Each activity had a set and familiar procedure to be followed, no matter when it took place in the course of the day.

Language Arts Activities

Planning/Reading. During this time students became familiar with the plan for the day and engaged in individual reading of their choice. The teacher usually used this time to take care of classroom business, run errands, and deal with individual items with students. Students moved quietly about the room, and often exchanged comments.

Conference Group. The majority of the class continued to read while one conference group met with the teacher at the front table. A

different, pre-set group met each day, Tuesday to Friday, concerning their writing. The students would gradually assemble at the conference table and begin to work on their writing. As the teacher discussed with each student, his or her work, the other group members listened, sometimes contributing, or they continued to work on their own writing until it was their turn for an individual conference with the teacher. The total group conference could last anywhere from fifteen to thirty minutes while the individual conferences with each student could last from two to ten minutes. The teacher usually made brief notes about the conferences with each student on individual index cards.

Writing. By the time the teacher had spoken with each member of that day's conference group, the rest of the class had moved into their individual writing projects and requested and/or received help from the teacher on an individual basis. At this point the teacher also circulated among the students and discussed their writing with them. Students moved freely about and in and out of the classroom, working by themselves or with another student. A low murmur of conversation was always present during writing activities, but only once during all of my visits did the noise level rise to the point where Brian felt compelled to ask the students to be quiet. Occasionally the teacher would interrupt the class in order to speak to them as a group about a particular idea, suggestion, or task.

Sharing. During the first hour of the morning a student designated as responsible for the sharing activity collected names of

those wishing to share some of their work that day. The students voluntarily chose to share and were free to share their work at any stage in the writing process. Quite often students sought the advice and suggestions of their classmates. Sometimes a student author was in need of a title for a finished piece, wanted to know what might come next in a story that was in progress, or was seeking final comments on a piece ready for publishing in the class magazine. When sharing, a student read his/her chosen piece to the rest of the class. Someone in the class then "received" the piece by repeating back, in summary form, the content of the piece. The rest of the class was then free to ask questions or make comments which took the form of "coaching tips" for the author. The teacher joined in as one of the class members during sharing time, asking questions and making comments.

Reading Groups (Novel Study). The four novel study groups each read different novels of varying degrees of difficulty. One group remained in the classroom while the other three dispersed to the library and hallway. When the groups met they discussed the questions that they had generated the previous day in view of what they had read in the novel. They then generated more questions and decided how much to read in the novel before their next meeting. Members of the group then took turns reading aloud to each other. The remaining time was spent on assignments created by the group and working in their novel study notebooks. The teacher circulated among the groups, listening, commenting, and sometimes guiding the discussions. The novel study

concluded with projects, bulletin board displays, and notebook completion, as well as a novel study exam made up of questions formulated by the students in their groups.

Themes

Teaching as a Philosophy

> What we're doing here isn't so much a way of teaching as it is a philosophy. So everything you do is the way you do it because of a philosophy you believe about learning (i April 23 p4).

For this teacher of twelve years, his language arts teaching could not exist separate from his philosophy. His philosophy was inextricably at the core of his teaching and it permeated his language arts program. As Brian attempted to articulate his approach to teaching the language arts in his Grade Six classroom, his comments often included phrases prefaced with "I believe . . . " and many statements of his philosophy.

> A lot of different people say "I teach whole language". I didn't worry about the definition. The definition was no longer important to me. Labeling things causes a lot of problems. I decided it was my philosophy that I was interested in." (i March 24 p6)

It was as if Brian was not implementing any kind of program in particular, but rather was simultaneously discovering his philosophy and developing his approach to teaching the language arts. As I listened to Brian and observed his program, I began to see that he

attempted to connect his philosophy with real life examples from his classroom and language arts program. It was as if the two, theory and practice, were not separate, but interdependent. For Brian teaching took place in the transaction between theory and practice, and where research and proof concur. It is this common ground on which he attempted to base his professional decisions.

> It has to work and there has to be evidence that it works. . . . But also supported by sound research. . . . It's got to come through from the research. And then the research has got to work and vice versa. They've got to complement each other. (i April 23 p10)

It was obvious that Brian was aware of current research in the area of language arts education. He often mentioned speakers that he had heard or articles and books that he had read. During the course of our discussions he made general reference to the works of Donald Graves, Jane Hansen, John Stewig, Jerome Harste, Yetta and Kenneth Goodman, Frank Smith, and James Britton. During a school term some years previous, Brian did a great deal of reading and writing, concentrating on developing his language arts program. He did say that although he did a lot of professional reading that year, there wasn't time for it now, when he was actually teaching. It was evident, however, that he had retained much of what he had read and was incorporating this knowledge into his language arts program. In so doing, Brian engaged in a great amount of reflection and self-evaluation, a practice which appeared to be imbedded in his teaching.

> I've got to slowly tear away the things that aren't proven and that aren't working. So it's a constantly growing experience in the classroom in your teaching. And you're constantly layering on sound theory and sound practice together. (i April 23 p10)

Brian's understanding of the interdependency of his philosophy and his program was illustrated in his comments concerning substitute teachers in his classroom. He felt it necessary to adjust his plans and his program to accommodate a teacher who may not be familiar with the philosophical basis of the program. On one hand, it was easy for an outsider to come in and supervise, as the routine was set and students functioned fairly independently. But on the other hand, it appeared as though Brian felt that a substitute teacher was not in the philosophical position or well-enough acquainted with the students to effectively guide them in their learning in the way that Brian, who was well-acquainted with each student, would. Brian did not view his approach to the language arts as a program that could be packaged up and implemented by any teacher, regardless of that teacher's philosophy or beliefs. Brian was aware that a particular philosophy was the essence of his language arts program.

Brian believed in what he was doing. He felt that all teachers should believe in what they are doing and that they should be "comfortable" with their teaching. He didn't, however, believe that his way was the only way. There were many ways to teach and this was his way because he believed in it and was comfortable with it.

> It's not good enough to say you're teaching whole language. You have got to believe it. Lots of teachers say yeah, they teach

> whole language and they use all the literature and everything but they don't really believe it because they're still going back to the structural thing where you do paragraphing, spelling, the whole works. (i April 23 p5)

He was tolerant of other approaches and I was interested in why, if other approaches were acceptable to him, he chose the approach that he did. When I said, "For some reason you've chosen this approach over a skills-based approach." Brian answered, "It meets my needs better. It's something I'm more comfortable with. Something I really believe in" (i March 24 p7). Believing in what he was doing in his language arts program was crucial to Brian.

A student-centered approach

> The program really doesn't matter. It's gotta be the kids (i May 14 p6).

In the context of his total approach, the above quote is indicative of Brian's belief in the child as the first priority. Getting to know his students and building their self-concept was of paramount importance to Brian and had great impact on his teaching. The quotes in this section illustrate just how important this was to Brian. He said, "To me getting to know the student is far more important than what he does or doesn't do. And how that student thinks about himself. Because that, to me, is the key" (i March 20 p5). On another occasion, when talking about what he saw as characteristics of a good teacher, Brian said, "Number one would be concern for the child,

not just concern for his academic but for his emotional . . . I think those two tie together" (i April 23 p11). This concern for the child, not only as a student in an academic sense but as a person with an emotional self linked directly to his/her intellect was evident in much of what Brian said about his program and in what I observed in his classroom.

> You have to know what the student is capable of emotionally. When can they be pushed? When do I lay off? Are they dealing with problems with parents? Are their basic needs being met? That's a professional responsibility. That's what I do. I teach. I believe it's a professional responsibility to know your students, both academically and as a person, a human being. (i April 23 p9)

In another interview, Brian related information about a student and provided an excellent illustration of his belief in practice. He described the student's difficult home situation, his knowledge of some particular instances that caused her emotional stress and explained how he adjusted his expectations of her academic performance while her energies were devoted to preserving her emotional health (i March 20 p5-7, 10, 11). This depth of knowledge and concern appeared to be expended on all of his students and I wondered if it became overwhelming for Brian. When I suggested this to him, his reply implied what he had said earlier, that it was his professional responsibility and that, to him, that was teaching. I came to understand that for Brian, teaching would be impossible if he did not know and care about his students as whole persons, taking into consideration their academic and emotional selves as interdependent, not as isolated elements of which the intellect was the teacher's only

concern.

The interplay between emotion and intellect was particularly apparent when Brian dealt with students' behavior. In handling potentially difficult students, Brian felt the greatest asset was in knowing the child. He explained that "as you get to know him as a person, he gets to know you as a person. Your discipline problems decline" (i April 23 p10).

From Brian's perspective, his knowledge of the student as an individual also helped him to individualize instruction in his language arts program. During one discussion he suggested how this might apply to helping students with their writing.

> And understanding that different students do it differently. Some students will rewrite it and as they are rewriting it they'll change huge parts of it. They'll add information. And it's perfectly okay. . . . [I also know] that some students won't do that. They don't learn that way. . . . You have to know your student. (i March 24 p4)

Brian went on to illustrate how he might show some students how to revise their writing by cutting and stapling, while he might demonstrate a different technique to other students; his choice of technique depended on what kind of learner Brian knew them to be.

While different students may have different learning styles, which Brian attempted to discover and accomodate, all students must feel good about themselves in order to learn. Brian's belief in the importance of self-esteem for learning was obvious in some of the comments that he made during interviews.

There's more there than just the skills and knowledge. More

> important is the positive feelings about yourself. And if the student doesn't have positive feelings, they're not going to learn. (i April 23 p5)
>
> It's child-centered education. It's where . . . what the child knows and what the child does is more important than the program. It doesn't matter if this child doesn't spell very well. . . . You concentrate on building his self-esteem. . . . You always work from strengths. (i March 24 p7)
>
> I believe that students come with a whole background and experiences that they've come with from before. And that they should be allowed to use those and they don't have to relearn them everytime. And so my philosophy is to try and develop the strength within a student and getting him to see further in himself by his own work. (i March 24 p6)
>
> My expertise is in the area of developing a kid's potential [from] where it's at right now. And developing a kid's attitude. And conferencing and writing with them and getting to know the kids. And I think that a lot of those things that I'm doing will help the child feel better about himself and understand himself better. And in the process I know more about the student. (i May 21 p4)

The connection between knowing the students, building their self-esteem, and assisting in their learning was exemplified in the writing conferences that took place with teacher and students. Brian was able to assist or "coach" the student author based on his knowledge of the students: 1) as persons with a wealth of past experiences and present interests, 2) as learners with abilities and emerging competencies, and 3) as authors with particular styles and individual voices in their writing. Brian saw himself in this role "just like a coach. I can see that a player is ready for a certain move. I can coach him for that move. A teacher should be able to know that" (i April 14 p1). The coaching metaphor can also be extended to include the way Brian capitalized on the strengths of the individual players

and how he acknowledged the "inner game" or mental set of his players and the influence it had on their ability to learn.

Knowing his students, as individual and whole persons, assisted Brian in determining what his students were emotionally and intellectually capable of, relieved potential discipline problems, supported the individualization of instruction, revealed strengths from which to build, and most important to Brian, helped him in developing positive attitudes and self-esteem among his students. Through observations and interviews, I came to understand that Brian's first priority was to get to know his students and thus, be better able to facilitate their learning. I was interested in uncovering Brian's view of the learner, what he believed about how his students learned, and what he saw as his role in that learning.

The students as natural learners

> We've got to back off a bit and let the students evolve. (i March 20 p4)

Brian's comments displayed a deep trust in students as learners in possession of a natural capacity and motivation to learn. Once he emphatically stated that "kids want to learn" (i April 23 p4) and another time said, "The kids are going to learn anyway. They learn in spite of us" (i March 24 p9). When discussing a piece of writing produced by one of Brian's more prolific student authors I asked about the source of this ability and if it was due to skills that Brian had

taught. Brian replied, "No, it's not skills that I've taught them. That's the incredible part. . . . The kids will pick it up. . . . I'm teaching him skills; but really skills to use something he already has" (i March 20 p8,9). Brian seemed to believe that the students' abilities were developing and that his own role was to assist or facilitate this growth.

Brian saw skills as a means to an end and not an end in themselves. When, in an interview session I asked Brian if he would agree that he taught "skills on demand" he answered, "Yes. If it's not a problem, then don't make it one. If it's not broke, don't fix it" (i May 21 p5).

On another occasion Brian spoke of skills instruction from another perspective.

> You don't teach bits of [writing]. You teach large chunks. I don't teach a sentence. I don't teach a paragraph. I teach writing. And if we need paragraphs then we make paragraphs. If we need better sentences then we use better sentences. If we need better vocabulary then we develop better vocabulary. But we don't do it in individual skill sections. (i March 24 p6)

Brian's comment seemed to suggest a belief that language learning takes place within the context of functional and whole discourse, not by fragmenting it into decontextualized "skill sections". Thus, skills were learned as a means to an end, not as ends in themselves.

At the same time that skills were learned as a part of functional language use and imbedded in the larger task of language learning, Brian's approach to the language arts was an integrated one. His statement, "Learn to read by reading, by writing, by talking about it,

by discussing it, all of those things" (i May 21 p5) indicates a belief in the integration of the language arts which is evidenced in his classroom program. His students experienced reading and writing simultaneously and in conjunction with the other language arts, skills were learned and practiced when needed by the students in order to accomplish a real (as in not contrived) language goal.

At one point, Brian claimed that "the only reason the teacher is there is to facilitate..." (i March 24 p4). Brian saw himself as a facilitator of the natural development of abilities and knowledge in his students. He believed that he was there to provide the necessary vehicles or techniques for the students' attempts at language use. During one interview he stated, "My job is to give them a variety of tools to use so that they can pick the one they feel most comfortable with" (i April 28 p5). Brian went on to explain his belief that there wasn't only one way to do things. For example, outlining wasn't the only way for students to organize their writing, so Brian exposed the students to alternate organizational strategies.

Brian recognized that the students "don't have enough experience" with writing (i March 28 p5) to be aware of the options available to them as authors and he attempted to expose them to a variety of tools or strategies with which to approach writing tasks. During the first novel study at the beginning of the year, Brian made the students aware of and generated models for writing and thinking strategies such as speedwriting and brainstorming as well as the creation of mindmaps and

ideawebs. When the students needed assistance in their work, Brian suggested that they try one of those techniques. In an interview session Brian explained:

> Well they say, "I'm having trouble getting started writing." And I say, "Well, try some speedwriting." Or, "Try some brainstorming." They all know what those terms are. And they say, "Well, okay." And they get started. (i April 28 p5)

> Basically what I do with the writing is I use students' ideas. And I try to highlight when a student comes across a particular form then we develop that. (i April 28 p25)

"Always a model" (i April 28 p9) Brian said as he talked about how he teaches language arts. Brian would develop a model, sometimes with the whole class and sometimes with an individual student who then shared it with the class. Either way, the students were exposed to the skill, the process, or the language form and had an example, or model when they needed it. In reference to writing skills in the class novel study Brian explained, "I highlight [the skill], first of all, I do it with just one person....And have him, or her write it. And then I use their writing to bring out the types of writing. To expose it" (i April 28 p26). He went on to say that there are some forms of writing that he introduced to the whole class, although he prefered to have the students identify the need. When I asked him why he felt he "had to" do some lessons with the whole class he answered,

> Well, because . . . they don't have the experience to know all the different types of writing. So you have to . . . You're trying to extend them so you bring in things that they haven't heard of before. They don't know about or that they should know about. And I don't have to do it for the whole class but I usually do because . . . we get a lot more ideas from it. And some people just let it sit for awhile. They don't do anything with it right

> now. But I might have three or four of them do it. And the model is left in their books and they can go back to the model. (i April 28 p26)

The use of exposure and modelling was well illustrated in Brian's description of the first, whole-class novel study at the beginning of the school year. By the time the class had completed the novel, they had been exposed to, and had generated, models of numerous literary elements and forms of writing. They had also had an opportunity to experience the processes involved in a group novel study. In the course of working through that introductory novel, Brian and his students dealt with a) individual language skills, b) forms of writing, c) listening and reading comprehension, d) literary elements, and e) novel study strategies.

Brian's approach indicated a view of the learner that was based on a great deal of faith in the student as a capable and motivated learner. This view caused Brian to see his role as facilitator and coach.

The issue of control

> . . . Getting off the pedestal . . .(i April 23 p11)

"Getting off the pedestal" was one of the characteristics Brian listed as belonging to a good teacher. It was his way of saying that teachers need to give up some of the control and authority that they excercise over students. Twice, when speaking to me, he mentioned his

own struggle in "giving up control and letting the kids go" (i April 23 p1). It was something he felt more teachers should strive for.

The issue of control and authority manifested itself in Brian's teaching and the way in which he interacted with students. For Brian, "letting go" meant sharing responsibility for the daily operations within the classroom; it meant assisting the students in retaining (or recovering) control over their own learning; it meant allowing students to make choices and to be held accountable; and it meant giving up the teacher as "keeper of the knowledge" image. For the students in Brian's classroom this meant being involved in generating and coordinating their daily activities; it meant taking control and accepting ownership for their learning; it meant making choices and decisions about their learning and about their behavior; and it meant becoming empowered with the capacity to unveil their own perceptions of reality.

Although student responsibility in the classroom manifested itself in other ways, an excellent example can be found in Brian's use of a daily planning time. The planning time was included in Brian's long range objectives for his language arts program. In the following quotes from our interviews, Brian read aloud (in quotation marks) and then elaborated on his objective for the planning time that began each day in his classroom.

> "The students will plan for ten minutes each morning what they expect to accomplish . . . This will include regular lessons as well as homework and study assignments.". . . That's what we do each morning. . . . I realized that what this does is it gets them

> coming in, gives them time settling their books, . . . they can do a little bit of talking but right away they have something to focus on and . . . its a routine that they know. And they can double-check things. I'm happy with it. I feel it's really settled the students down as far as focusing their attention on what's going to happen during the day. And it involves them in some of the planning. . . . So it's sort of a confirmation. I know what they're doing and they know what they're doing . . . (i April 28 p3)

> And the plan, a plan is such a repetitious thing each day. But it is really important to the students. Now not all the students write it down anymore but that's not important. They know where to check. You'll see students checking all the time -- What is next? What do they do? . . . They have a plan. [I] have students now planning their own material. . . . It all goes back to where we were talking...A whole language classroom should be more structured than any other classroom you've ever seen in your whole life. . . . You said the other day . . . you observed the kids being able to move to these things and do these things on their own. Now how are the kids going to be able to do that if it's all up here, in the teacher's head? It's gotta be in the kid's head! (i March 24 p5)

Brian certainly didn't keep it all in his head. He made explicit, much of what he was thinking as the teacher in his classroom. Brian's most prevalent method of sharing responsibility with his students was simply to make them aware of, not only the daily plan but, many procedures and processes in the classroom. In this way, the students gained autonomy in changing activities and engaging in different learning tasks. During my observations the class consistently moved smoothly from one activity to the next in accordance with the plan and the preset procedures, without direction from the teacher. Occasionally I saw students reminded by their peers or by Brian to "check the plan". Brian would calmly say something like, "It's 9:30, please check the plan." Students who were aware of, but chose not to

comply with, the plan usually "owed" some of their free time to Brian, which meant they would spend some time after school engaged in the activity that they had chosen not to do during the time designated by the plan.

At the same time that Brian's students were given a great deal of freedom and responsibility, his classroom never appeared to be out of control or chaotic. I asked Brian about how he judged when the student had the control and when he (Brian) had the control. He replied,

> I'm the person who's also responsible for what happens in that classroom so I better darn well be in control. But, as much as possible, in that classroom, whatever students can do, should be done by the students. Now it doesn't always happen but that's sort of a rule. If you're doing things now that the students can do then you're not using your time effectively. (i April 23 p12)

Brian continued by clarifying that he felt that it was part of professionalism to be able to judge when the control was the students' and when the authority was in the hands of the teacher. We discussed how it might be possible to help teachers begin to share responsibility with their students and Brian once more displayed his deep trust in students as capable individuals saying earnestly that "the students will accept the responsibility. The more responsibility you give the students, the better they'll behave. The better they'll interact" (i April 23 p13). Because Brian believed that his students were capable of handling a large amount of responsibility, he gave them a large amount to handle. Thus, using professional judgement, he attempted to put as much control as possible in the students' hands.

Brian also believed that "we don't learn in a vacuum, either.

There has to be a structure" (i March 24 p1). Even though he gave his students a great deal of freedom of choice and a lot of independence, language learning took place within a structure that Brian felt was crucial to his program. He also felt that the students needed to know what those structures were so that they could function autonomously within them.

> It's more important that the student knows what's happening. And that's the key. You should be able to walk into my classroom . . . anybody should be able to walk into my classroom and I should be able to walk out and the kids should be able to continue with what they're doing -- provided they understand that there are consequences for not doing what they are supposed to do. They should be able to continue what they are doing and they should also be able to tell the teacher that goes in there what they are doing and what they are supposed to be doing. The routine should be like that! (snaps fingers). (i March 24 p4)

Structure, in a program such as his, that allowed for (and actually promoted) a great deal of student autonomy and choice, was a necessity. It was important both on a classroom level and at the individual student level.

On a number of occasions, Brian reiterated his belief in the importance of students being aware of the routines, the expectations, the processes, and the structure of their daily activities in the language arts classroom.

> Your expectations for behavior, your expectations for work, they're all laid down in the front. . . . For students to have the independence they need to know what you're going to do when "this" happens and what they can do. What are the limits of the classroom . . . (i April 23 p4)

And then, Brian seemed to imply, when students were given the freedom to make choices along with enough information to make informed

choices, they could, and should, be held accountable for their choices. He expressed the belief that with this type of approach students had to be made accountable. Accountability was a major consideration for Brian as he mentioned it often and made a conscious effort to incorporate accountability checks in his language arts program. Students were held accountable for engaging in language arts activities as were indicated on the daily plan. Their lack of cooperation usually meant they would "owe" Brian some of their own time outside of the normal school day. The students were made accountable for their choices in their work when asked to talk about or explain the rationale behind those choices. Brian was interested in having students make the attempt to articulate the support for their choices, whether it be their choice of novel to read, their comment on another student's work, or their ideas in a piece of writing they might be working on.

The request for rationale never appeared as a challenge or a test on Brian's part. In the instances that I observed, Brian seemed to be genuinely interested in finding out what his students were thinking, while at the same time making them accountable and prompting them to accept ownership of their work. Brian made constant efforts to put his students in control of their own learning. He seemed very aware of how this was done.

> As long as she's headed in the right direction, my pointing out [minor discrepencies] to her would then put the control back to me rather than the control to her. And I think as teachers we've got -- and we've got to do this a lot more -- we've got to take [our] control out. (i March 20 p3)

> It took him a long time to write that. . . . There was no reason to stop him from what he was doing. But I could see that he was starting to be consumed by this story and finally he said to himself, "I would like to try something else." (i March 20 p8)

Another aspect of his language arts program, which exemplifies particularly well Brian's efforts to leave the ownership and control of learning in the hands of his students, are the teacher and student-author conferences. For instance, in the writing conferences, the students were treated as authors and they responded by accepting the position and behaving like authors, willing to take ownership and control of the ideas, the writing, and the "voice" in each piece.

Brian explained that he attempts to "listen to a student and zero in on what skill the student wants to develop. . . . to help the student come to know what he needs to learn [and to] recognize what he wants to change. All this, so that . . . the student stays in control" (i April 14 p1).

Brian's program reflected his belief that teachers need to give up some of the control and share more responsibility with their students. Although he identified this issue (of control) as one of his constant struggles, in observing his program I saw that his achievements were noticeable. His students had a substantial degree of control over their own learning and had a good deal of responsibility for their behavior and activities. Brian was, in essence, attempting to empower his students: he coached them to take control and to make decisions about themselves; he put considerable effort into making students aware of their limits and options; he attempted to make the students aware of

their own learning processes.

Evaluation

Evaluation is teaching and learning. (i April 21 p3)

When I first approached Brian and mentioned my interest in his evaluation procedures, he insisted that he didn't really engage in much evaluation. He said to me, almost as a warning, "I don't get hung up on evaluation -- which could get me into trouble some day" (i April 21 p1). What soon became obvious to me was that he thought I was looking for a formal type of evaluation, a type he disliked and didn't do much of. When I asked him what he meant when he said in our initial telephone conversation that he didn't "do much", he explained, "Well I don't do much . . . when I say I don't do much, I don't do much of the traditional mark and grade type of thing. . . . I guess too, I dislike evaluating work. I dislike formal evaluations, tests" (i April 21 p1).

He said he disliked tests " . . . because they don't always tell what the student is doing or what the student is thinking" (i April 21 p1). Formal evaluation and standardized tests did not tell him much about his students' intellectual capabilities. For instance, once he referred to a student's score on a standardized reading test administered at the beginning of the school year and, although he appeared to consider her score to be above average, he commented, "I don't think much of those scores because she's a better student than that" (i April 28 p1). Another time he said, "To me, it is the most

pointless type of evaluation. Your low students are going to come low and your high students are going to come high" (i April 21 p4). At first glance the preceding comments may appear as conflicting but what they do suggest is that whatever the formal test results, Brian felt that he knew "basically where all the kids [were]" (i April 21 p1), and that, in actuality, he relied on sources other than formal evaluation for more credible information about students' abilities and language learning. Formal evaluation did not provide Brian with information about what he considered important, individual student progress in the language arts.

From Brian's perspective, formal evaluation had a very limited role to play with regards to his students and their language learning. It had very little to offer the students in the way of learning. When he said that he disliked tests and grades he added, "Now I also think they are very valuable" (i April 21 p1) and went on to claim that "academic students" needed to learn how to write exams and that he actually devoted some of his teaching to exam-writing skills. Brian seemed to feel that exams were a future reality for most of his students and that a positive attitude and some "creative thinking" strategies would help students to cope with exam writing. Thus, for Brian, there was some very specific and limited potential for student learning in formal evaluation.

In addition to preparing students for future exam writing, formal evaluation in the form of standardized tests provided Brian with some

feedback on his total program and how it fitted into the existing school system. In relation to Brian's overall program, the results from standardized tests taken at the beginning and the end of the school year were most valuable to "...monitor the program more than the students. There should be some growth in the students [visible as well]" (i April 23 p13). He used the results primarily as an indication of the general growth of his students and the efficacy of his program. Brian also looked to the results of the system-wide language arts test that was administered near the end of the school year. He told me that those results would indicate to him where his students as a group and where his program would "fit into the system" (i May 28 p1). Brian felt that, although it was a "good test", it was "not holistic" and "not real discourse" and therefore, could be used by a teacher to "evaluate your own program but not to evaluate the individual student in your program" (i May 28 p1).

It became obvious that Brian did not intend to use a standardized, system-wide test for the purposes of evaluating individual student's language arts capabilities. A system-wide language arts test was administered during one of my observation sessions and a week later I asked Brian about the results. He explained that he had only glanced through the completed tests and sent them away to be marked. Brian did mention that he would be most interested in how his program fitted into the system this year. He definitely considered the results more valuable as an evaluation at a program level than as a valid indication

of individual student growth in the language arts.

Thus, for Brian, formal evaluation played a limited but useful role in rating the overall efficacy of his language arts program as compared to other programs in the system. Formal evaluation did not, however, assist in the students' language learning or provide Brian with information about individual student progress.

Informal Evaluation

Brian was interested in promoting and monitoring his students' growth in the language arts. He was very aware of individual student progress. His awareness was generated by the informal evaluation techniques imbedded in the language activities within the program. Brian knew what each of his students was capable of, what they had learned, and where growth was taking place in their language use. In addition to comments like "I know basically where all the kids are" and "I'm very conscious of which students are doing what" Brian demonstrated his awareness when he spoke of individual student's work. In talking with me he was able to detail his students' progress, comparing previous levels of ability to newly developed capabilities. Most definitely, Brian was interested in his students' language development and was using evaluative methods that both facilitated and made visible the processes of language growth.

Thus, in Brian's program informal evaluation meant holistic, formative evaluation that was most effective when generated by the students themselves. For Brian, it meant constant analytical

observation, keeping mental notes and written records, and continuously reporting to the student.

Informal evaluation within Brian's language arts program can be characterized by the following four principles.

1. Brian observed students' use of language within the context of natural, holistic language use. Brian evaluated his students' abilities as they were utilized within the context of functional languaging events such as writing. In reference to this Brian said that he determines

> the skills of the students as they're writing. And I don't worry too much about marks. . . . I'm more concerned with this (motions to a folder of his students' writing) and if these are the things where I get a mark, I go through my checklists and I sort of say, "Oh yeah, he's doing this, he's doing paragraphing, he's doing punctuation, and he's doing expository and narrative type writing." (i March 20 p1)

Brian had identified what he called "indicators of a good writer" and felt that these indicators could be exhibited by the students in any of the many forms of writing. In other words, students were exposed to and provided with models for the many forms of writing but to Brian, it was not crucial that the students exhibit proficiency in every form. He also developed "indicators of a good reader", many of which he looked for within the context of their response to the novels. By looking for indicators, Brian was able to evaluate his students' reading and writing capabilities within the context of more natural language situations.

Brian also evaluated his students' language abilities,

specifically their reading comprehension, through their response to the literature they encountered in novel studies and in listening to the novels that he read to them. When speaking of individual students, Brian often referred to their level of thinking and comprehension as it was indicated in their discussion (oral or written) of a novel or story. Depending on the content of their response to the literature and "their interpretation of what the story was about", Brian was able to judge their level of "understanding of the literature" and reading comprehension. "They start to make an interpretation and a comparison to other forms of literature, rather than just tell what the story was about. And actually [I] can see that...in some of the work that the students have done" (i March 20 p2). Brian went on to say that when students categorize books it "tells [him] that they are on a higher plane than somebody who is just focusing on the book" (i March 20 p2). In this way, Brian evaluated students' reading comprehension, informally and in the context of a purposeful language event.

Brian felt less confident about his reading program than his writing program. He knew that there was a lot to know about developing readers and that he only knew some of it. "I really feel uncomfortable about teaching reading because of what I know about it. . . . And I really feel sort of almost inadequate to deal with all those things that they're saying that are happening in reading" (i May 21 p1). He did know that in his program, comprehension was the goal and that his students' level of comprehension could be assessed by looking at their

oral and written response to what they read. He expressed that belief in the following comment, made during one of our interviews.

> So again the reading to the writing. But there's very high comprehension in that. . . . And that's where I feel I don't really need a reading test to say that comprehension is at such and such. . . . I guess we're sort of ingrained that we need a grade score. And I don't believe we do. I believe I have to look at what the student is doing and what the student is reading and what the student can talk about. And if the student is doing those things and getting obvious enjoyment, I don't think we necessarily have to put a grade score on it. (i April 28 p11)

Brian believed he was able to determine the level and the nature of the comprehension by listening to students discuss their reading in the novel groups, by talking with individual students about the story or a novel project they were working on. When evaluating in context, Brian's role was that of analytical observer as he observed and recorded information about his students' growth in the language arts. For example, in relating one particular instance Brian said he observed a student receiving help from some other students and that he (Brian) made a mental note to check on that student's retention and use of that skill, possibly with the goal of direct instruction (i May 21 p5). Thus, Brian was gaining information about his students' abilities by observing the learning that took place within the natural context of interactive language use, was analyzing the information, and planning his program.

In his long-range objectives for language arts Brian wrote that "the evaluating procedures will be class discussion during and following the novels, observation of changes in the student reading".

He continued by saying, "So that would be an example of the things I do in evaluation. It's very, in a sense, a lot of my evaluation is fairly subjective" (i April 28 p7). If by subjective he meant analytical observation within a natural language context, he was right.

2. Brian found formative evaluation most suitable in his teaching of the language arts. One day (April 21) I asked Brian to talk to me about his method of evaluation and he spoke briefly but assertively of the limited usefulness of formal evaluation within his program. He was less definitive when he spoke of his approach to informal evaluation. For example, during one interview he attempted to explain his approach but seemed to have difficulty in reaching a definitive statement. He said evaluation took place in " . . . the sharing of writing. . . . very much working together. Building in mechanisms . . . see it's not an evaluation as much as it is a -- um -- I'm here to teach. I'm here to coach. They're here to learn" (i April 21 p2,3). What he seemed to be suggesting was that his evaluation techniques were imbedded in his students' daily language activities and were therefore part of learning and part of his teaching. In essence, Brian was describing his approach to evaluation as formative rather than summative. Brian eventually defined his approach in this way, "For me, evaluating is teaching and learning" (i April 21 p3). Again this suggests a formative quality in his approach to evaluation.

In reference to evaluation within his writing program Brian said,

> I guess my thing is the students are always evaluating each others' work. They're evaluating it through their questions.

> They're evaluating it through their responses to the students. Uh, group sharing that we have, we try to have at least three times a week. Probably one of the most important parts of the writing program is sharing your writing and having it responded to by other students. (i April 21 p3)

Brian's method of evaluation included a great deal of feedback during, and as a part of, the learning process. I suggested a short definition to him and he agreed that "feedback for the purposes of improvement" was "exactly" what evaluation was to him. He commented, "I might say learning. I might use some different words but basically -- that's all we do. That's all I do in math, that's all I do in social studies, that's all I do in language arts. Constantly feeding back, trying to get them to improve" (i April 21 p5). In my visits I observed Brian's students continually receiving feedback in their informal interactions with each other during class, in the group sharing time, and in conferences with Brian.

This type of evaluation was not summative. It was definitely formative in nature. The students' improvement, growth, and learning was based on the dynamic interchange and growth that is the essence of formative evaluation. One quote seemed to encapsulate Brian's belief in the vitalness of formative evaluation.

> The student has to be a part of the evaluation process. Otherwise it's a waste of time. If there is no interaction there, if the student is not made to do the thinking, it seems to be an awful waste of time. (i April 21 p5)

It was evident that Brian didn't see much value in a form of evaluation that didn't involve students in their own learning, thus making the evaluation a language learning experience in itself. Informal,

formative evaluation was an integral part of Brian's language arts program and his teaching.

3. Brian saw self-evaluation as the most valid form of evaluation. The students' ability to evaluate themselves was an important goal in Brian's language arts program. Self-evaluation acted as intrinsic motivation and promoted independent learning.

"Now they're getting into evaluation because the students are doing it themselves. They're not doing it because you're giving them a mark" (i April 21 p1). Brian seemed to sense that self-evaluation can act as reward or a motivator in itself, thereby accomplishing, intrinsically, what marks sometimes accomplish as extrinsic motivators.

"All my evaluation, not all of it, but as much as possible, . . . is geared toward making the student take responsibility for the work" (i April 21 p6). By helping the student to monitor his own learning and performance, Brian was developing independent learners. For Brian, self-monitoring, or self-evaluation, was one of the most important qualities of an independent learner. One day when one of his students said, "This is going to be the best notebook that I've ever done.", Brian felt that she was performing self-evaluation and exhibiting independence in her ability and inclination to self-monitor the quality of her work.

4. Brian's recording and reporting was continuous but not laborious. He said, "I'm evaluating all the time" (i April 21 p6). And along with continuous evaluation, came continuous record-keeping.

Brian's record keeping was not extensive, or time-consuming. Basically, he kept three types of files. He knew his students well enough to be able to maintain "mental files" of their learning. He also had the students keep a file of their writing and notebooks for each novel study. As well, each student's progress was recorded in anecdotal form on an index card to which a checklist was attached. Anecdotes included notes from conferences about student writing and novel study assignments and exams. Brian tried to keep these written records up to date but admitted that even though it wasn't time consuming or difficult, it was easy to fall behind. This may have been because it was easier for him to just keep the information in his head and not write it down. Brian knew so well the objectives, indicators, and checklist items that he seemed to be able to retain very detailed information about each student's progress in his memory.

He made some of the following comments when talking about using anecdotal records.

> I'm making anecdotal records. . . . I use them all the time. . . . you just go through. When you work on these cards it's only a word or only a comment you date. So you're flipping through the cards and you say, "Ah, Samantha . . . ". . . . And sometimes you wouldn't comment. But you'd make a mental note. . . . The cards work really well now because I can carry them with me and I can put checklists on them and that sort of thing. It's great. (i April 21 p8)

The students in Brian's program received feedback on a continuous basis and were often read or told the content of their anecdotal records. Brian sat down with each student on a regular basis and discussed his/her progress in the language arts. In essence, they were

experiencing an ongoing, oral report card that was formalized in writing when it went home to parents. When reporting to parents Brian attempted to present a "fairly detailed [and] . . . a very individual report card on each [student]" (i April 21 p11). To accompany each of the three report cards in the year Brian composed a two page letter to the parents, outlining and explaining the language arts objectives and expectations for his program. The two parents interviewed expressed satisfaction with the extent and content of Brian's reporting and felt that they were well informed about the program and their child's progress in the language arts.

Informal and formative evaluation was imbedded in Brian's language arts program. While his students were engaged in purposeful language activities Brian collected information about their capabilities and development. He utilized his extensive knowledge of individual students, supplemented by anecdotal records, on which to base his feedback and guidance for each student. He valued self-evaluation and strove to develop independent, self-reflective learners who took control of their own learning.

Literacy and literature

> Learn to read by reading, by writing, by talking about it, by discussing it, all of those things (i May 21 p5).

In Brian's language arts program literacy learning meant students were actively and freely engaged in natural, interactive languaging

activities, spontaneously integrating the language arts. The interaction among language users seemed to occur naturally and continually in the language arts program and Brian seemed to recognize the value of that interaction in language learning and thinking. When I asked Brian why it was important for the students to talk about their reading, he replied,

> Because I think that's where comprehension comes in. Just like what we're doing right now. I think it's a very adult-like behavior -- a lot of our thinking comes through discussion with other people. And then if we don't talk about it then we . . . just tunnel right down and that's the vision we have of the story. But by talking with other people, about characters, about setting, about people, we broaden our view. It becomes much more diverse. And you can accept a lot of other ideas. (i May 21 p2)

Brian felt that the purpose for reading was comprehension. In one of the interviews he said, "What's the purpose of reading? . . . It's to understand. Comprehension" (i May 21 p3). To Brian, comprehension was not just understanding the story by itself, comprehension was also understanding how that story and its meaning related to life, the personal life of the reader and life in general. His willingness to accept various interpretations of meaning and literary response from individual students and to incorporate that into their learning activities supported that notion. The novel study exams included at least one question about the significance of the meaning of the story to the student's life. In Brian's program, the development of comprehension of the story and its relevance to the student's world was greatly facilitated through student-led, oral discussion in the novel study groups. The following quote from one of the interviews

exemplifies Brian's focus on comprehension development through interactive language use.

> I try to set my program up so that . . . they're thinking ahead of the story rather than just what's happening now, what might happen. I'm trying to develop their knowledge, their experiences, using their own experiences and relating it to the story. And I'm trying to broaden those experiences by having other group members around them talking about their experiences. And I feel that the group in reading, in the grade six class, that this is the way to go. Because you can meet more kids' [needs] and the kids get more of a chance to relate and discuss. And talk about the things that they're reading in the book, rather than in a large group with me, just answering the questions and me controlling the conversation. (i May 21 p2)

This interactive, student-centered approach to literacy learning was also apparent in the writing activities that students were involved in when working together in novel study groups, discussing their ideas with their peers as they wrote, and sharing their writing with the class. Brian explained, "We develop through our own writing. . . . a lot of the skills. We talk about characters and setting and plot in our own stories. And we take it back to the literature" (i May 21 p2).

Brian's definition of literature was very broad and changed, depending on the context. Although he said that "basically anything that the student has to read is literature" (i May 21 p7), he felt that as a teacher he was there to enlighten the students and broaden their view of literature. Brian judged what literature would fulfill this purpose on an individual basis. He was satisfied if some of his students were reading anything, while in other cases, he was more selective. What he would like to see any particular student reading depended on that student's abilities, interests, and attitude toward

reading. This became obvious when he explained how he considered a skateboard magazine to be suitable "literature" for one student and definitely not challenging enough for another (i May 21 p6).

An interactive and integrated approach to language learning seemed to fulfill two functions in relation to the role of literature in Brian's language arts program. On one hand, the literature facilitated an interactive and integrated approach and on the other hand that approach facilitated the use of literature. At one point, Brian and I agreed that this relationship, between his approach and the role of literature, was a "chicken and egg kind of thing" (i April 23 p8) in that it was difficult to tell which one preceded the other. For Brian, the approach and literature existed in a symbiotic relationship, each one facilitating the other.

In the following quote from an interview, Brian explained how he began to use literature in the language arts.

> When I first started teaching, I did not really feel happy with the students' progress or my ability to develop enthusiam. Stories in readers were built around themes that did not necessarily appeal to all students. When a story did appeal it was usually over before the students had a chance to feel appreciation. Assignments were teacher controlled and generally for a specific teaching goal and not necessarily a goal that the students needed. . . . I noticed in longer pieces that students really began to read and try to understand and interact with the characters or the story that they were reading. And they'd start talking about them. . . . Plot, setting, and all the other literature components are much easier to discover in a larger novel. . . . It's almost impossible, I think, to teach those things sufficiently in a really short story type of form. So I wasn't happy. It wasn't going anywhere. Kids were reading. But they weren't reading with any real feeling. . . . Now, then I started reading novels and giving assignments. . . . They weren't actually reading but they were listening and doing skills from a

> novel there. . . . I also tried using individual novels where the student was reading his own novel and then doing work. And that was not all that satisfactory. . . . the problem with that is that there was no discussion between books. . . . And it was really hard to monitor what [the students] were doing. At this point I came across other teachers who were working with group novels. And I became convinced that this was the easy way to teach reading in [grades] four, five, and six. This gave you the volume and the quality of reading that was necessary to teach a real literature program. And the things I discovered was that there was greater enthusiasm, the student discussion led by them at their own level investigated a lot of different areas . . . they really dig deep into the novel. It better met individual needs. . . . Students who had trouble with reading were able to discuss things with other students, they were able to listen to the discussion that was going on and say, "Did that really happen?". (i April 23 p6,7)

Brian made it clear that there were certain things he wanted to accomplish in his language arts program and that literature, in the form of novels, allowed him to reach those goals. But at the same time, Brian seemed to feel that he chose the literature first and then developed his program around the literature. This symbiotic nature was revealed in the following comment.

> I believe I teach the way I do because of the type of person I am. That novels do complement that. But my real reason for using literature stems from my early years. And the belief that readers [as in reading texts] cannot adequately teach all the components of literature. I was headed towards using novels long before I was teaching this way. So it was sort of a progression, a development in my teaching. . . . I feel that I chose the literature for the program first. And as I became more comfortable with it, it sort of brought in some other things. Because I had to rethink my program and reorganize it around the novels so that it allowed freedom and individualization. (i April 23 p8)

Brian seemed to be saying that while the kind of person he was, or the way he taught, led him to use literature, at the same time literature led him to teach in a particular way. Literature was chosen because of

its inherent qualities, or what it was able to do as literature, and the program evolved from the literature as a base. Literature was also chosen, however, because it allowed Brian to develop the kind of language arts program that he wanted. Thus, the role of literature in Brian's language arts program was two-fold, as the impetus for the program and as the facilitator of the program.

Chapter Summary

This chapter offered a description of Brian's language arts program and the philosophy and beliefs underlying that program. Information about the physical space, the students as a class, the teacher, and the organization of language arts activities formed a context for the six themes that represent the philosophy and beliefs of the teacher.

Brian's classroom was a complex social phenomena. Although it did not appear to be highly organized with regards to visual aesthetics or physical space, the individualized nature of the activities and Brian's desire for independence in his students necessitated a great degree of structure and organization in the program, beneath the surface. The atmosphere in the classroom was relaxed and supportive of students, encouraging them to take control of their own learning but at the same time work in collaboration with fellow students. Both the organization of the program and the language arts activities focused on the processes involved and the interactive nature of language learning.

Brian's philosophy and beliefs were represented in six themes presented in the chapter. The themes included:

1. Teaching as a philosophy,
2. A student-centered approach,
3. Students as natural learners,
4. The issue of control,
5. Evaluation and,
6. Literacy and literature.

Brian's philosophy and beliefs permeated his language arts program from its development, as the basis for Brian's decisions, to its evaluation, as Brian reflected critically upon his practices and made changes.

Chapter Five

Reflections and Discussion

An overview of the study precedes a reflective literature review and a summary of the findings in relation to the original research questions. The chapter includes implications for further research and, in conclusion, a final statement is made.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to illuminate one Grade Six teacher's professional beliefs and philosophy that impacted his literature-based language arts program. In the process, the researcher investigated how that teacher diagnosed needs, planned for learning, assessed student progress, and reported to parents and administrators. Through classroom observations and unstructured interviews conducted within a twelve week period, data pertaining to the language arts program and to the teacher's beliefs and philosophy was collected. In addition, two administrators and two parents were interviewed.

In the data analysis I sought first to generate a qualitative description of the program components and second to identify and present themes that emerged as representative of the underlying philosophy and beliefs of that teacher's program. The emergence of those themes brought to light certain concepts or ideas that in turn, caused me to seek a "frame of reference" in the published literature.

The discussion that follows is a product of my reflections on the research findings.

Reflections

The works of Freire and of Graves provide a frame of reference for Brian's philosophy and practices. Brian's philosophical approach to teaching the language arts appears to be reminiscient of Freire's notion of problem-posing education, while the particular practices involved in Brian's program are very similar to the practices suggested by Graves. Brian's evaluative practices are of particular significance as they are so integral to his program and because his understanding of evaluation emerges as one of the most distinguishing factors of his philosophy. Thus, a discussion on informal evaluation as it is relevant to holistic language arts programs follows the discussions of Freire and of Graves.

In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire (1970) describes and contrasts two concepts of education: banking education and problem-posing education. He describes banking education as dehumanizing and therefore oppressive while problem-posing (or liberation) education is described as humanizing and therefore, not oppressive, but liberating. He states that authentic liberation can be achieved through the process of humanization, not oppression.

Brian sought to liberate his students by fostering their independence as learners and as members of society. His approach to teaching was a very humanistic one which did not suppress the

individuality or creativity of his students.

Through an analysis of the teacher-student relationship within the two contrasting concepts of education, Freire reveals differences in the teacher-student relationship. In banking education the teacher acts as a depositor and the students are the depositories; the teacher is the narrator and the students are the audience. The students then function as receptors, a role that inhibits the dialogue that Freire considers vital to liberation education. The use of dialogue facilitates true communication, critical thinking, and the cognition that unveils the individual's reality. The development of problem-posing dialogue requires a parallel partnership between student and teacher, rather than a hierarchical relationship such as that of employer and employee.

Brian related to his students within a dialogue relationship. This was particularly evident in writing conferences as Brian attempted to facilitate the students' recognition of their own knowledge and struggled to allow the students to be in control of their own authorship. In dialoguing with students about their writing, Brian worked at helping the students to identify what it was that <u>they</u> wanted to write, not what Brian thought they should write or what he decided they should learn. The students in Brian's program had control of their own learning and Brian strove to follow their lead.

Banking education upholds the cultural reality as static and fixed, in contrast to the transforming quality of a cultural reality

"in process" that is basic to liberation education. Dealing with a static reality minimizes and annuls the student's (and the teacher's) creative powers; a transforming of their reality fosters creative powers. Problem-posing education necessitates creativity, critical-thinking, and action. Knowledge is seen as mutual inquiry into the invention and re-invention (or creation and re-creation) of the reality of one's individual and social existence. On the other hand, banking education views knowledge as a commodity that is possessed by "the knowledgeable" and thus, as a gift that can be bestowed upon those considered to be without knowledge. This hierarchical relationship promotes a one-way transmission of a given view of reality or knowledge, from the depositor to the receptacle, or, from the teacher to the student. In contrast, a two-way exchange of knowledge, such as Freire's concept of dialogue in which mutual discovery involves equally active participants with each participant sharing the roles of teacher and student, leads to a humanizing and liberating form of education.

Brian was able to follow the lead of his students and foster the development of their independence in learning because he did not see himself as the holder of knowledge as a commodity. His practices indicated that his operational understanding of the nature of knowledge was not that of absolute truths, but relative to each individual's capacity to understand for himself or herself. When working with students, Brian was most interested in what they perceived their

reality to be. He was willing to let everyone's perception of truth be their own. Thus, for Brian, knowledge was not static. Nor was it something that he possessed in order to give to his students.

The role of the educator within the banking concept of education is to regulate the way in which the world appears to the student. The liberation educator's role is to empower students in order that they may re-create their world. As a basis for this difference, Freire identifies conflicting conceptions of man's existence. The "bankers" regulate because they understand man to be in the world, more as a spectator, and as a possessor of consciousness as a container. In contrast, the liberation educators seek to empower because they believe that man is with the world, more as a creator, and as a being whose consciousness is an activity of becoming conscious of, in a sense unveiling, their lived reality.

Definitely, Brian sought to empower his students. He saw his role as coach and facilitator of his students' learning. In urging the students to become independent and to take control of their own learning, Brian seemed to communicate to the students that they were capable of, and at the same time responsible for, creating their own reality. Brian was a critical thinker in that he constantly reflected on his own existence and took charge of re-creating that reality. His model was before the students everyday and they too, began to partake in critical reflection. Brian seemed to believe that a positive self-concept, independence, the ability to make choices, and critical

reflection were of priority to his students' learning.

Freire proposes that education, then, becomes the practice of liberation and the educated person is the liberated person. He or she is able to transform the world through reflection and action. In action, this concept of education is both humanizing and liberating. Brian's approach to teaching and his language arts program might be considered an example of liberation education.

With regards to the specific practices of Brian's program, the work of Graves provides a frame of reference. Many of the language arts teaching strategies suggested by Graves in Writing: Teachers and Children at Work (1983) were evident in Brian's program. Much of this inclusion was conscious on Brian's part as he had attended some of Graves' workshops, read some of his works and had been for a number of years, putting great effort into developing a language arts program similar to that of Graves.

In Brian's program, the process-orientation of Graves' was evidenced in a number of ways: 1) the students were involved in different stages in the writing process, from the conception of an idea to self-evaluation and publication, 2) Brian's emphasis was on ideas and effort rather than the superficial features of a finished product, and 3) achievement was indicated by growth and development of the "voice" in the students' writing.

Brian's writing conferences embodied evaluation in a formative sense, as does Graves, who does not make much specific reference to

summative evaluation of students' progress. For Graves, and for Brian, evaluation was very much imbedded in the whole conferencing and writing processes. As well, evaluation existed for the direct purpose of continued improvement and growth in the students' writing. Imperative to its formative nature was the interaction between teacher and student and their respective roles in the writing conference. Graves suggests that the teacher should act as an advocate for the student-author, rather than as an adversary. He puts the onus on the teacher to facilitate such a relationship. Brian's role was primarily that of coach and facilitator as he entered into dialogue with students about their writing.

Graves promotes the teacher's use of observation as a primary means of keeping track of students' development. Brian observed his students in many ways and recorded the information both in his memory and on index cards. He also used folders of the students' writing as evidence of their growth and improvement. Graves recognizes that too laborious a task of record-keeping is not practical nor efficient but that a certain amount is helpful and may be necessary for the teacher's use. He emphasizes that teachers need to internalize enough information about their students that they are able to respond spontaneously in conferencing situations. The priority that Brian gave to "getting to know" his students must have aided him in internalizing information about each individual's progress, which he could then use as a basis for the guidance he gave each student.

There are many parallels between the teaching practices suggested by Graves and Brian's practices. Like Graves', Brian's program was literature-based, student-centered, and process-oriented. There are also parallels between the philosophy within Freire's discussion of liberation education and the underlying philosophy in Brian's program as indicated in the themes that emerged in this research.

The praxis of Brian's program appeared as a harmonious manifestation of the transaction between his philosophy and practice. The process-oriented and student-centered nature of the practices suggested by Grave's and utilized by Brian in his language arts program supported an approach to literacy learning that was both compatible with, and facilitated by, a liberation education philosophy such as Freire's.

As was evidenced in the description of the evaluation theme in Chapter Four, many informal evaluation practices were imbedded in Brian's language arts program. In fact, informal evaluation was present to such an extent that it became a distinguishing feature of Brian's philosophy and program. Much of what Brian did as evaluation was interwoven with other practices and not always easily visible. His approach to evaluation very much concurs with the five principles of informal evaluation identified and described in the literature review (Chapter Two). Brian's "testing", or evaluation methods, evolved as a natural outgrowth of his teaching practices and therefore the two, testing and teaching, were compatible. His statements about formal

evaluation indicated that he, too, believed that formal, standardized evaluation was not suitable for an approach to language learning which focused on process, not product. It was particularly evident that, in Brian's program, evaluation of students' language capabilities took place within the context of purposeful language use. Brian collected information about his students' language learning through observation. On a continuous basis he collected and analyzed data about his students' development, basing program decisions on his conclusions. The learners in Brian's class engaged in self-evaluation in most of their language experiences. Self-evaluation contributed to the independence of the learner, helping to place the learner in control of, and accountable for, the total language learning process.

Discussion

Research Question One. What does this literature-based language arts program entail?

The language arts program described in this study was literature-based and student-centered. As well, the program was both an integrated and a process-oriented approach to language arts. The program utilized many of the practices proposed by Graves (1983). The evaluative methods were informal and formative in nature.

Research Question Two. What philosophy and beliefs underlie this teacher's language arts program?

Brian's philosophy and beliefs that emerged in this study are represented by the following six themes:

1. Teaching as a philosophy
2. A student-centered approach
3. Students as natural learners
4. The issue of control
5. Evaluation
6. Literacy and literature

These themes represent a philosophy and beliefs that are similar to that presented by Freire (1970) in his discussion of liberation education and literacy.

Suggestions for Further Research

The purpose of this study was to identify the philosophy and beliefs underlying one literature-based language arts program. Each of the six themes that emerged as representative of the teacher's philosophy and practices could be considered as a possible topic for further research. By focusing on just one of the themes, or issues, the research area would gain greater depth and potential for determining teaching applications.

Concluding Statement

This study focused on one Grade Six literature-based language arts program and attempted to identify the beliefs and philosophy underlying that program. Through classroom observations and unstructured interviews with the teacher, data was collected and then analyzed. Six themes emerged and were reported in the study as 1) teaching as a

philosophy, 2) a student-centered approach, 3) students as natural learners, 4) the issue of control, 5) evaluation, and 6) literacy and literature.

In the course of the study it became clear that this program was not only literature-based, it was also a student-centered, process-oriented, and integrated approach to the language arts. For the teacher involved in this study, the incorporation of literature into his language arts program was not as integral to its base as was his own philosophy and beliefs about learning and teaching.

The diversity of the teacher's beliefs that appeared to be integral to his program is significant in that it illustrates the complexity of this literature-based program and its implementation. For this teacher, "literature-based" was not merely the presence of trade books in the curriculum. His choice to incorporate literature into his language arts program was based on highly complex decisions and inextricably tied into his philosophy and beliefs. For those teachers attempting to incorporate literature into their language arts program, it may be significant to recognize the complexity and depth of one teacher's philosophical basis and the extent to which that teacher's philosophy and beliefs impacted his language arts program.

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Appendix 1

April 13, 1987

Dear Parents;

I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta and am working on my Master's thesis. I am interested in studying a language arts program that uses literature (novels, poems, short stories) as the basis for learning to read and write. In order to obtain the information that I need, I will observe the language arts program in the classroom and spend time working with the teacher, finding out about how he/she develops the program for the students. There will be no achievement tests or evaluations done in this study. All participants, teacher, students, and parents will remain anonymous.

Mr. _____ has agreed to be a part of the study. We feel that his participation will be of benefit to what is already an excellent language arts program in his classroom. I would like your son/daughter to take part in the study as a member of Mr. _____'s class. Please complete the form below and return it to Mr. _____ by Thursday, April 16. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to call me at the University (432-3913). Thank you for your assistance.

Brenda Bell
Graduate Student
University of Alberta

I, _____, am willing to take part in the study described above.

_____
Student's signature

My son/daughter, _____, may take part in the study described above.

_____
Parent's signature

I, _____, am willing to be interviewed as part of this study.

_____
Parent's signature

No, we do not wish to participate in the study.

_____
Signature

Appendix 2

April 16, 1987

Dear _____;

This letter constitutes a preliminary analysis of the data I have collected through observations in your classroom and discussions with you. Although I have visited your classroom only seven times and conducted only three taped interviews, I think that I have enough data to enable me to identify emerging themes and images that seem to be present in your teaching. However, it is important to acknowledge that, at this point, these themes are initial and have a "first impression" quality. And, like first impressions, they must not be set in stone. It is imperative that these themes be held open to change, modification, or even deletion. As the data collection and analysis continues I may find that some themes are secondary to more major themes and actually exist as sub-themes, that some themes need to be discarded as they are invalid and not substantiated by the data, or that some themes are more extensive and necessitate enrichment or in-depth investigation. Even though the identification of themes is only tentative, it will serve to clarify the purpose and focus of the research. As well, your knowledge of and reaction to the preliminary analysis will serve, not only to generate more data but to enrich the quality of the data.

Your reaction to the information in this letter is greatly appreciated and is acceptable in whatever form you choose (no violence, please). Jest aside, you may choose to write comments and questions directly on this copy or make mental notes to yourself. Either way, the contents of this letter and your comments may serve as a basis for discussion during our taped "interview" sessions.

Please feel free to question both what it is that I meant by what I have written as well as whether or not I have understood what it is that you meant by what you have said or done. With the great degree of awareness that you demonstrate, I do not anticipate that I, or this analysis, will be "turning on any lightbulbs" for you regarding your teaching. However, my observations and comments may serve to both affirm and support what you are attempting in your language arts program.

The following are some of the possible themes and supporting excerpts from the data. As I have already said, it is all tentative and definitely open to change.

#1 Teacher as coach. One of the strongest themes thus far has to do with your role as a teacher. You appear to perceive your role similar to that of a "coach". This is especially apparent from what

you have said directly to me during our discussions. A number of times you have actually labeled yourself as a coach and spoken of your interactions with students as coaching. I am wondering if this metaphor is something you attempt to make real, as in a goal you have chosen to achieve, or whether it is, for you, a way of describing what you do, a label on reality. I can see how much of what you do in your teaching and your interacti ons with students could be described using the metaphor of a coach and team. There are many secondary metaphors and themes appearing in the data that would support the larger theme of teacher as coach. I am beginning to see the coaching role through the classroom observations although there it is subtle and is imbedded in the complexity of classroom interactions.

#2 The student as an independent learner. This theme seems to include both the belief that the students are natural learners and that "they learn in spite of us." (i3 p9) and the belief in the students' need and ability to be in charge of their own learning and behavior. In class, I have observed your interactions with students, where you constantly attempt to put the student in control of his/her learning by allowing the student to make decisions to determine the content and direction of his/her learning. As I observe and record more of the conferences that you have with students, I will be able to verify as well as expand on the description of this practice.

#3 The real world. This theme is not very clear to me yet and it may not be a strong one. On the other hand, this may be a theme that threads its way into all of the other themes. It seems to be related to your statements that you are more concerned with the students developing attitudes and concepts than acquiring skills and facts. Much of your language arts program and the way you teach indicates a real concern, on your part, for nurturing the students' self esteem and their sense of personal responsibility. Perhaps this is because you believe that those kind of attitudes will be more valuable to them in the "real world" and that those (positive) attitudes are not worth sacrificing for the sake of the acquisition of skills. Your concern for the student's self esteem permeates much of what I have observed in the classroom. The way you deal with discipline, your casual interactions with students, how you receive incorrect answers, the praise and constructive criticism you offer, and the structure of your language arts program all, in some way facilitate the development of positive attitudes towards him/herself ond others.

#4 Literature as a facilitator. At this point there is not much evidence in the collected data to support this theme. However, for some reason you have chosen literature as the material for your language arts program rather than a prescribed reading series. Why? My hunch is that, rather than because of a love for literature, although that is most likely present, for you, literature acts as a

facilitator for the more major objectives of your total program. Objectives that deal with student attitudes, teacher-student interaction, knowing your students, individualizing instruction, and developing "real world" concepts are of primary importance. It seems possible that the use of literature may, among other things, facilitate the achievement of those objectives for you. As we focus our discussions on your language arts program, the role of literature should become evident in the data.

#5 Getting to know your students. "To me, getting to know the student is far more important than what he does or doesn't do [on a diagnostic test]. And how the student thinks about himself. Because that, to me, is the key." (i1 p5). You have expressed this belief a number of times in our discussions. At first I thought you meant that you must get to know the student in a personal way but then I came to understand that you consider it equally important in an academic sense. You appear to believe that you, as a teacher, must get to know your students both personally and academically. In our third taped interview you described how you might interact with individual students differently, depending on how you knew them to be as a learner.(i3 p4) I began to see how knowing the student academically allows you to individualize instruction and the student to retain control over their learning. I have already observed this phenomena in your classroom and as I follow your interactions with two students specifically, I will be able to record and explore this in more detail.

#6 The student as a whole person. The information that you shared with me about _____'s home life (i1 p5-7,10,11) and how you adjusted your expectations of her is an excellent illustration of this theme. You appear to have a real concern for the student as a whole person that comes into your class, and doesn't have to check his/her real self at the door (so to speak). I am wondering if you see this as a task of threatening proportions or if it is more of a natural or subconcious action on your part. Perhaps this has bearing on what the "best personality" (i3 p9) is for a teacher in this type of program. Nonetheless, the acceptance of the student as a whole person has impact on the language arts program. An example of this is the free choice of topics for writing in your program(i1 p6). It is evident that the students often reveal parts of themselves in their writing and that you are able to "get to know" more of the whole person through their writing. Research tells us that students will not reveal themselves unless they feel comfortable in doing so. Classroom climate and the nature of the teacher-student relationship are the crucial factors. Your program has met the criteria for at least some, and perhaps all, of your students. How you use the student's writing as a source of information about the student, both academically and personally is of great interest to me. This use of response may become a theme in itself as it is evident in other themes such as "evaluation" and

"getting to know your students".

#7 Teacher letting go of control. "And I think as teachers we've got to take the control out. We've got to back off a bit and let the students evolve." (i1 p4). I will take a chance in saying that I think this is a direct outcome of your belief in the student as a natural learner. Because you have trust and faith in the student to be responsible for his/her own learning, you can allow yourself to let go of some of the control. As we both mentioned, this is extremely difficult and even scary for most teachers. This is understandable as the way in which the present education system is structured does not facilitate, or make easy, the shift of control back to the student. We talked informally in the hall one day about this and you expressed that it was a struggle for you and that you had to continually remind yourself to let go of the control. I can see the possibility of parallels with Paulo Freire's concept of dialogue and liberation education.

#8 Teacher as person with personality. Again, this theme has two angles: your perceptions of desireable personality traits in a teacher and the role that your personality plays in your own teaching. You have frequently expressed the need for a teacher to be comfortable with whatever they are doing in their language arts program and have also related some of your own experiences in searching out practices and developing a program with which you were comfortable. I am wondering what else you think a teacher should base their decisions on or if being comfortable with something is justification enough? Once you emphatically stated that "...the best teachers all have personality."(i3 p9) As it was near the end of our session, we didn't explore this very much but I am wondering just what kind of personality is "best". You have often expressed tolerance for other teaching styles and approaches. Would it be safe to say that there may be a "best personality" for a literature-based language arts program such as yours? I have observed how much you let your personality and personal self into your teaching and interactions with students. Is this a direct outcome of your belief system? Perhaps this is an indication that you perceive and deal with not only the student as a whole person but you, the teacher, as a whole person, as well. This must have implications for the teacher-student relationship (the nature of which is beginning to appear similar to Paulo Freire's concept of dialogue).

#9 Evaluation. There appear to be two approaches to evaluating your students' language arts capabilities:
1) A developmental approach: Re _____'s abilities- "And somebody like _____, she'd have to struggle with the definition. Her reading is down here. It's not wrong, it's just where she is. . . . I would watch for growth, things like that. . . . They're not perfect yet, but it's much better than where she was before. . . . So to me, that's growth. So I

can report to the parents that yes, the comprehension is growing and this is where it's growing. And that she is reading, and she is understanding better, and she's understanding for these reasons. . . That's more my approach to evaluation." (i1 p4).
2) A whole language (real, functional writing or reading) approach: Re folder of students' writing- "A lot of what I base the defense for my program on is the skills of the students while they're writing. And I don't worry too much about marks. . . percentages. . . . I'm more concerned with this [writing folder] and if these are the sort of things where I get a mark I go through my checklists and I sort of say, 'Oh, yeah, he's doing this. He's doing paragraphing. He's doing punctuation. And he's doing expository and narrative type of writing.' And that's what I write my report cards on for language arts." (i1 p1).
I am interested in gathering more information about both informal and formal evaluation in your program. It is a huge and complex topic, I know, but it is my hope that focusing on two students specifically, will make the effort manageable for us both.

My task now is three-fold. First, to validate, modify, and enrich the themes that are emerging through the continued collection and analysis of data. My second task is to illuminate the bridges between the theory and the practice in your language arts program. In an effort to illuminate those bridges I will pull on my understandings of research and theoretical writings about teachers' personal practical knowledge and teachers' curricular decision-making processes. Last, my task is to generate a comprehensive description of your language arts program as it is implemented, "in action", so to speak. Therefore, I will be seeking more information about how you as the teacher, diagnose needs, plan for learning, assess progress, and offer feedback within a literature-based language arts program such as yours.

I am thoroughly enjoying the collection of data and feel fortunate to have found a teacher as cooperative (and articulate!) as you are and a classroom as welcoming as yours is. I hope you enjoy reading this letter. I truly look forward to your comments.

Sincerely,

B45576